The most cost-efficient magazine for ZX Spectrum enthusiasts

BREAK SPACE

Issue 4

you'd moan at the snow 'Cos your car wouldn't go

World of Spells Brings the Magic

A Winter Wonderland of game reviews!

Roojliek

The Locked Room

S1ncla1r C1ty

Partuza

Bolalela 5

CSSCGC retrospective!
Crash Live! - Trip Report

ZX LOAD Museum : Interview with the founder

News, Hacks, Crossword & an awesome BASIC listing from ZxMoe

PLUS!
The inarguable 2025 Game of the Year!

Editorial

4 issues, 12 months, 186 games. a year.
A whole year.
We don't get many of them, so we should be more careful what we do with them.
I started a magazine last year. I can recommend it.

Running out of years was not something most of us were thinking about when we first got Spectrums, whether at Christmas or a birthday or just from saving up our pocket money. Those years were longer, action-packed, and endless.

But then you get on a bit, and you have more behind you than ahead. If you're not careful, you start getting all nostalgic. We're not about that here, we're all about looking forward. Which sounds like it shouldn't be possible when we're talking about an ancient computer, but somehow it is. In this issue, as we spin into a new year, we're looking both ways with a host of features.

One person who's thinking long and hard about the future is João Diogo Ramos, who talks about his legacy as defined by the ZX Load museum in Portugal.

We take a long look at one possible future for ZX Spectrum game development with Kwyll, and an old dog learns some new tricks in record time.

As for the past, comp.sys.sinclair royalty pays us a visit to mark the 30th anniversary of the Crap Games Contest, as The Infamous Blood himself recalls the founding of a great and terrible beauty. We're still keenly awaiting the winners and losers of the 2025 contest, which will define who will have the honour of hosting the jubilee edition.

And Sloany does his best to convince you to book a holiday in Kenilworth this year, as he gives us the lowdown on the Crash Live event that gathered the clans in November.

That's plenty to keep you engaged for the winter months, surely, atop the regular piles of reviews, news, POKEs, BASIC, and assorted nonsense.

Thanks for sticking with us. Enjoy the issue, let us know what you think, and we'll be back in April. Keeeeeeep dancing!
Mpk

Cover Notes

Kevin from **keezees.com** has completed a hat-trick of top covers with this winter edition, featuring a wizard blasting Spectrum-rainbow magical fury at an off-page opponent. When we suggested the theme, we weren't expecting Kev to fashion himself a wizards hat from pizza-restaraunt flyers, repurpose a wooden spatula as a wand and take reference photos of himself to compose the scene. But that's what he did, the maniac. And more power to him.

Want to make a contribution to the Spectrum scene in 2026?

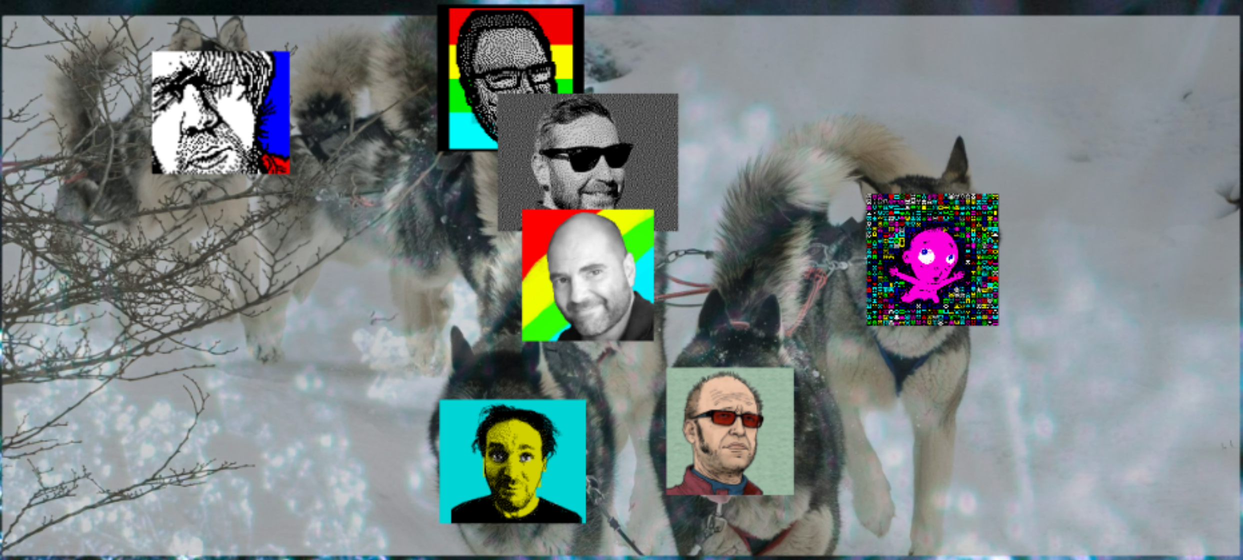
Why not join the giddy gang of gaming Gods on the Review Crew?
Or maybe you have an project or viewpoint that needs to be covered.

Simply send us a writing sample, or feature proposal, or *whatever*.
Point your email at **BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com**

We're ready to believe you.

Born Anew Review Crew

Look at this bunch of Januses, looking back on the games of 2025 and forwards to 2026.



Phil 'Snouty' South was guest of honour at Crash Live, where he got to meet Sloany in person. One of them was more excited than the other. I'll let you guess which was which.

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : An R36S emulation console in tasteful purple. For reviews on the move.

Via this issues's reviews, **Jon** got the chance to illustrate that he doesn't know anything about comics or Anime or Mythology. He's not some kind of nerd! He writes ZX Spectrum game reviews, you know. Hmm. Hang on a minute...

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : A The Spectrum, not yet powered on as it doesn't include a cable. Woe.

Andy is dealing with Important Life Events currently, and only managed one review this issue. That's just enough to keep him on the Crew, the sneaky bugger. Perhaps he was hoping to qualify for a Christmas Bonus. If so, then the joke is very much on him. And on the others, of course,

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : Peace on Earth. I hope he kept the receipt.

Possible elephant **Dave** has taken a subscription to Crunchyroll TV in order to research anime for his reviews. He now knows the 'over 9000' meme, and is waiting for a chance to impress the kids with how down with it he is. So very unc.

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : A kilogram of salted caramel nuts. Honestly, that's what he said.

Heart-throb **Jamie** had a headache that lasted 9 days. Just think, ladies, you could have been gently applying a cold compress to his temples that whole time. His illness didn't stop him producing top reviews though. You could have been the one at his sickbed, taking dictation. *Mass swooning ensues.*

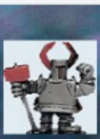
Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : Some luxury chocolate, and a quality boardgame. So classy!

Back in December. **Shaun** was in 10 European cities in just 2 weeks. 3 of them were Birmingham, but still impressive. We only sent him out for doughnuts.

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : A Santa Cruz Eric Dressen skateboard. Yeah, I had to google that as well, but it's pretty cool! If you're very lucky, you can catch Shaun gleaming the cube at a skatepark near you.

Award-winning **Sloany** got to go to Crash Live and have a booze-up with Kevin Toms, of which we can all be jealous. He didn't ask Big Kev about the snakes though, which was disappointing.

Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : A Casio watch, styled exactly like his 80's one. So he can be comfortably right about the time, but reassuringly wrong about the year.



Mpk is very proud of his little elves, as Dave has requested the team be called. Jury's still out on that one.
Best Chrimbo present, 2025 : Booze, and lots of it.

index

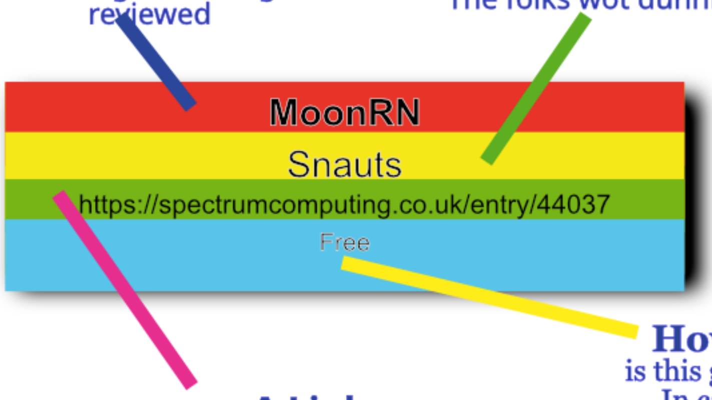
The Haps	Stuff that happened, or may happen. Or is happening.	6
ZX Load Museum Interview	We had a fascinating chat with Museum founder João Diogo Ramos	20
BASIC Ball	ZXMoe presents a type-in that goes hard in the paint. Oo-er.	36
Football Manager Revisited Visited	Sloany has a quick chat with Glen Anderson	44
Dawn of Crap	The Infamous Blood reminisces on the founding of the CSSCGC	52
4 Hours with Kwyll	Mpk tries to make a game in 4 hours. That'll never work.	64
Manic Mailers	Your emails, comments, faxes, posts. Keep 'em coming, folks.	69
Crossword	Set Brains to 'On', nerds	84
Crash Live! Trip Report	Sloany bothered folk at the recent Speccy convention	87
Game of The Year!	Like the Oscars, only 48k	114
Hack Pack	ANDREW RYALS converts his brain into cheating.	118
Glossary	What are we talking about? Let's break it down.	121
The End	Had to happen eventually.	122

Reviews Index

0Score	60
Alien Attack and Alien Attack 2	12
Astrodrone	78
BASIC Tower	15
Blood of Dracula	29
Bolalela 5	104
Boris and the Buses	47
Catshell	49
Crabby is Back!	100
Dr. Jim's ZXmas 2025 Quiz	110
F1 Championship	103
Flappy Saga	61
Floppyverse	79
Football Manager Revisited	42
GOLD RUSH '94 -The Run for Bronze	46
JAAM Rivals	108
King Kong Parte I : El Muro	56
Lopezno's Back	16
Lysergic Mushrooms Desire	41
Magic Adventures	72
Mazinger Z: Koji to the Rescue of Super Alloy Z!	73
Mega Serpiente	14
Ninja Secret Agent	97
O-Cman+	28
Operation Bee	48
Partuza	81
Peg Solitaire	11
Perseus	8
PHANTOMAS BASIC	92
Pixel Python	93
Pulplife	111
Puppies Rescue	34
Puzzle Invaders	32
Pyramid Solitaire	35
Quivira: The Adventure	109
Rebel Wars	76
Rebirth of Cthulhu, The	10
Roojliek	82
Roshi Milk Course	50
S1NCLA1R C1TY	58
Santa's Lost & Found	57
Sinclair Tower	33
Single Dragon	74
Sonic ZX - Boriel Adventure	45
Soy Stomper Jr	107
Speccy Saga	98
Speed Race	96
Star Carrier Ruffian	112
Starball	106
Syrion - The Time of The Dragon	70
The Experiment	62
The Locked Room	18
Throbbin' Christmas Headaches	102
Willy in the Islands of Mystery. Pt II: The Temple	30
World of Spells	94
Xenomaze	77

Review Header Explained

So, we have this colourful box at the top of every review. Just in case there's any confusion, here's what it all means.



The name
of the game being reviewed

Publisher / Author
The folks wot dunnit

How Much
is this going to cost? In cases where there's a suggested but not compulsory Pay What You Want option, we list it as PWYW / £suggested

A Link
to the game's entry on SpectrumComputing.co.uk
You'll find lots of data there, all sourced from the mighty ZXDB.
Sometimes the games are available to download directly from SC, but generally there will be a link to itch.io or wherever under the 'Related Links' section.

Review Policy

We cover each game on its own merits, and look for the positives. The majority of the games here are hobby projects. It would not be fair or useful to review such projects harshly.

Each game will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers, and given a fair assessment in its own context.

We don't award scores, but we do grant the coveted Break Space ACE award to the most deserving titles. Which games will claim an Ace and join the hunt for our coveted Game of the Year? Read on!

The Haps

'News' that for the most part happened last year. Finger on the pulse!

Blocky Graphics

Everyone's favourite 48k marvel? Rendered in Lego? Available to purchase? If Lego register enough interest on their web page? Including Lego Clive Sinclair driving his Lego C5? Oh, go on then.

lego.com

It's all gone Pearshaped

PearPixel is a newly launched sprite editor and animator, for Windows and MacOS. It supports things like OR,XOR,BLIT and MASK, which you'll understand if you're in the target audience of wiseguy Speccy developers. Have at it!

zxpearpixel.itch.io

Willys in Action

JSW Central, the world's premiere hub for all right-thinking Jet Set Willy and Manic Miner afficianados, has launched a YouTube channel, so you can watch people who are much better than you complete incredibly difficult games. Effortlessly. The smug so-and-so's.

Youtube.com

Compilations Compiled

Gordon Sinclair has launched a project to discuss and review compilations released for the Spectrum over the decades. There's a YouTube channel as well.

Durrell's Big 4 was my favourite. It had Turbo Esprit on it! Vroom!

compilationzx.com

COMPILATION
+ZX+

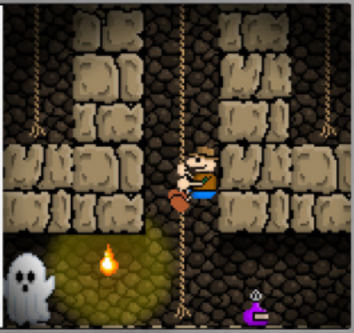
One Trackball Mind

If you have a Next, and why wouldn't you, you're probably sitting up of a night fretting about how to properly control your Missile Commands, your Quazatrons, your Combat Schools. Fret no more! Grab a Nextball Arcade in black or purple, to match your Next.

retrotr.my-online.store

Nextball Arcade

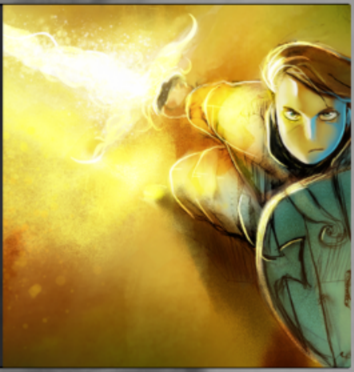
Dibnah? Astair? Bassett?



Solid gold classic Fred has been remade anew for modern platforms. So get over to itch, pay as much as you'd like and get tomb-raiding like it's 1984. You can even play with the original Spectrum colour scheme if the fancy strikes.

lvideo4867.itch.io/fred

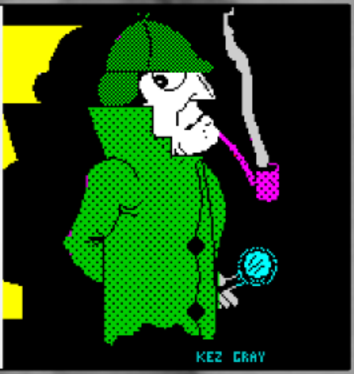
Your Adventure is Awaited



Bytemaniacos, the site best known around here for their annual BASIC contest, has opened their Aventura 2026 contest for Text Adventure and RPG / Rogue-like games. You've always wanted to write a text adventure. Everyone has. Now's your chance. You can even win prizes worth up to 25 quid. Swoon!

bytemaniacos.com/web/?page_id=4293

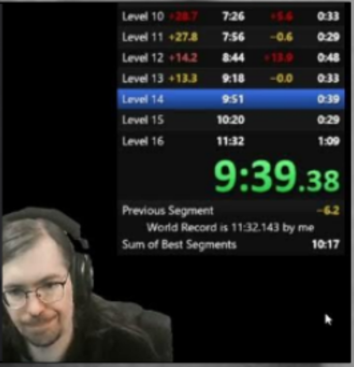
Smuggler Beheaded



Back in 1988, Pat Walsh released a text adventure called *Sherlock Holmes in The Case of the Beheaded Smuggler*. YS gave it a very respectable 8 out of 10. Now, Mr Walsh has finally gotten around to publishing a novelisation, which you can buy on Amazon, in print or Kindle. Someone please draw him a cover.

www.patwalsh.co.uk/case/

10-Minute Egg Coming Up

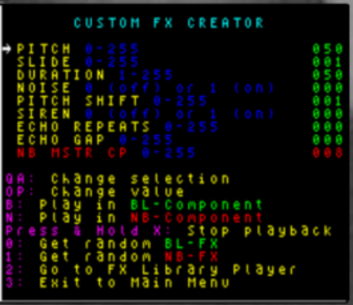


```
Level 10 +28.7    7:26   +5.6   0:33
Level 11 +27.8    7:56   -0.6   0:29
Level 12 +14.2    8:44  +13.9   0:48
Level 13 +13.3    9:18   -0.0   0:33
Level 14          9:51          0:39
Level 15         10:20          0:29
Level 16         11:32          1:09
                        9:39.38
Previous Segment                -6.2
   World Record is 11:32.143 by me
Sum of Best Segments           10:17
```

Exciting times in the Speccy Speed-Running scene, as the Chuckie Egg records tumble. Johnnyred_loadzx, possibly taking advantage of a quiet day at the museum, posted a 13:09.016 in December, but then psenough posted a speedy 10:53.140 on Jan 5th. Is a sub-10-minute run possible? That's next on Sky Sports 4.

www.speedrun.com/chuckie_egg

My MPAGD Goes BEEP



```
         CUSTOM FX CREATOR

PITCH 0-255                        050
SLIDE 0-255                        001
DURATION 1-255                     050
NOISE 0 (off) or 1 (on)            000
PITCH SHIFT 0-255                  001
SIREN 0 (off) or 1 (on)            000
ECHO REPEATS 0-255                 000
ECHO GAP 0-255                     000
NB MSTR CP 0-255                   008

QA: Change selection
OP: Change value
B: Play in BL-Component
N: Play in NB-Component
Press & Hold X: Stop playback
0: Get random BL-FX
1: Get random NB-FX
2: Go to FX Library Player
3: Exit to Main Menu
```

Tom "SausageWare" Potter has released a Spectrum Beeper Plugin for MPAGD, the very thing to add a little pep to those platformers. Full breakdown next ish.

sausagewaregames.itch.io

Magazine Discussed

Generally excellent podcast 8-Bit Back Issues slipped up in December and had Mpk on as a guest to talk about Crash Issue 18. But Phil was on the previous month to discuss Your Spectrum 18, so it balances out.

linktr.ee/8bitbackissues

Perseus

Retrobensoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45158

Free

In the times of ancient Greece, life was cheap. I think back to my Classics teachers, Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Elwood, trying to get me to remember something—anything—from that era. I'm a little stuck. Draco's code of laws (which gave us the word "draconian")… the hectemorage system… the isle of Lesbos—oh, err…

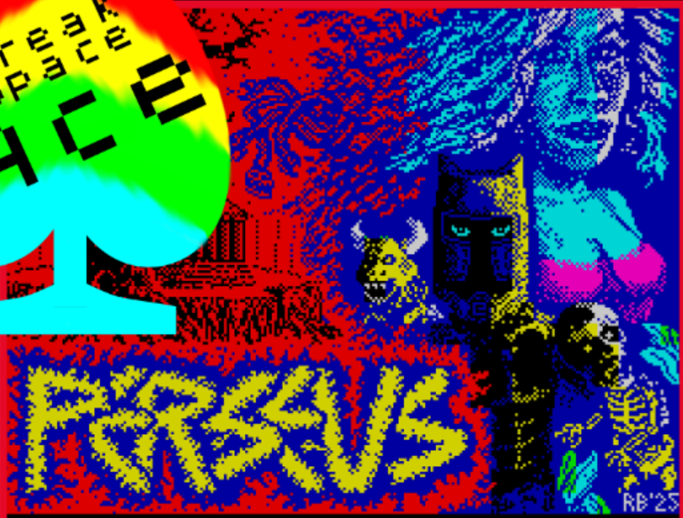
In the end, I probably learned more from the epic stop-motion brilliance of Clash of the Titans: the story of Perseus and Andromeda, the winged horse Pegasus, and, of course, Medusa—the snake-haired villainess whose gaze turned mortals and Titans alike to stone.

Into this mix of rich and fertile history and myth comes the game Perseus, for the 128k Spectrum.

The game begins with a cut scene explaining how Perseus is challenged to recover the head of Medusa by a king who fears Perseus will one day grow strong enough to overthrow him. The quest is designed to lead to Perseus's death—the real goal of the crooked king.

Having played the game, I can see why the king was so sure the mission would end in failure. The game appears quite difficult at first. It is very easy to make a small mistake and die. Enemies can deplete your life bar quickly, and once it's gone, you are dead.

However, this is no simple generic platformer. Perseus is an excellent game, and once you get to grips with it, you find plenty of tools to ensure your mission is not the suicide the king expects. A few tips are worth noting to get started: Perseus will jump farther the longer you hold down the button. Also, when walking forward, pushing down will transform you into a green disk that can spin quickly across the screen. These two mechanics are key to survival and progress.



A Gift From the Gods?

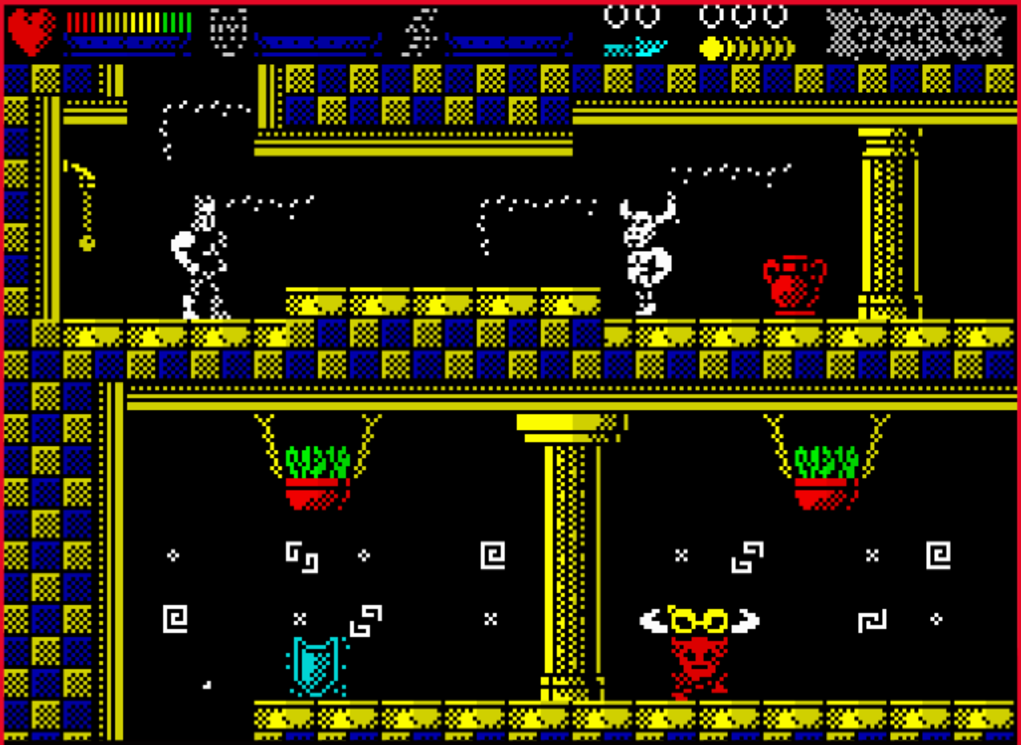
Power-ups are meaningful and necessary. Health potions, shields, and speed potions all make a big impact and are dotted around the map in key locations. Using them strategically is crucial to success, as is planning your route. The level design is excellent. Booby traps, ladders, drops, and challenging enemies lurk around every corner of this maze-like platformer. Picking a route that collects key items while avoiding invulnerable monsters is part of the challenge.

The game's pace is methodical, allowing time to think and solve problems as you go. This makes it all the more fair when you stand on a trap for the tenth time and get killed by spikes or crushed by boulders.

Thematically, the game shines. There is a real sense of exploring the myths of ancient Greece. Minotaurs, warriors, giant snakes, and ultimately Medusa await you in her lair.

It's up to you to complete the quest the king thought impossible. To put it simply, Perseus is a brilliant Spectrum game. It masterfully weaves its mythological setting into challenging, thoughtful gameplay. Every death feels earned, every victory hard-won. By cleverly using its unique mechanics and power-ups, you can defy fate, kill Medusa, claim the crown, and achieve your destiny.

And in doing so, you don't just become a legend from a film or a dusty textbook. You live the myth, through skill and strategy. For turning a classic tale into such a compelling and satisfying challenge, Perseus earns its place among the greats. Now that is an epic worthy of making Mr. Hobbs and Mr. Elwood proud.



I should have been nicer to Ariadne

I love my Greek mythology! Like JB, my interest didn't stem from school lessons but from the films of Ray Harryhausen, with Jason and the Argonauts being a particular favourite - one I still revisit from time to time. They don't make them like that anymore. But anyway… on with the game!

Perseus has sparked quite the debate here at Breakspace Towers. And, Very much like the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (it's uncanny, really), myself and JB found ourselves in a philospical debate, finding ourselves distinctly at odds!

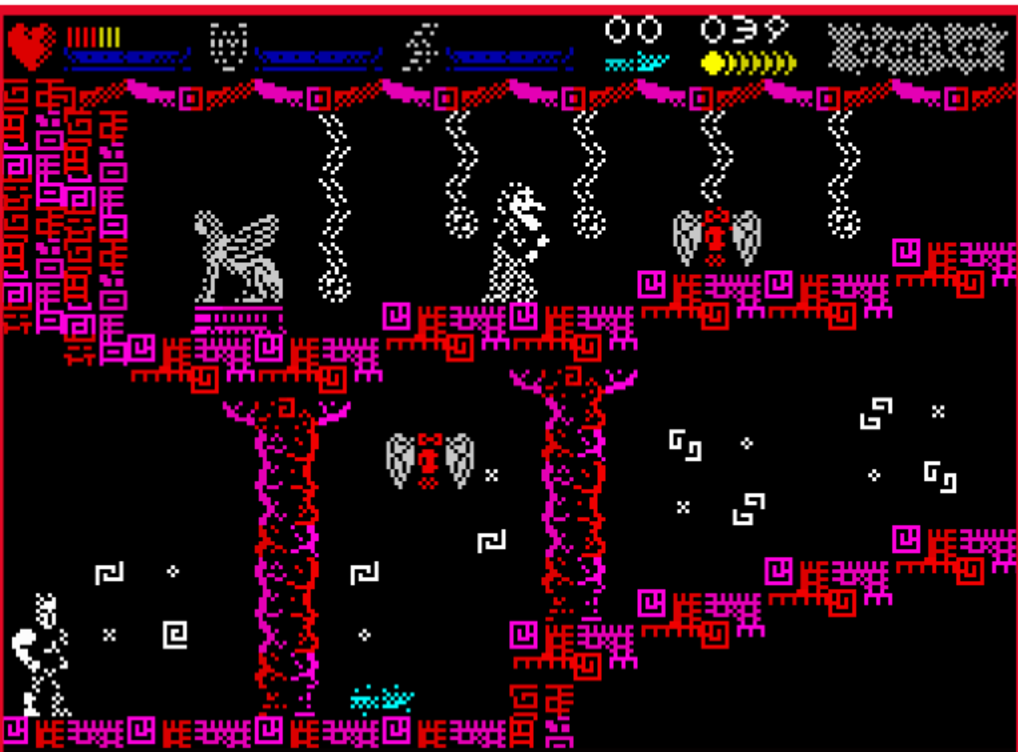
At first glance, Perseus reminded me of the great Bitmap Brothers' game Gods - the 16-bit ancient-Greek platformer - but don't do what I did and go into this game expecting something similar. This isn't an all-action, knife-throwing beat em up! Instead, much like the (real-life?) Perseus - a hero famed for ingenuity over brute force - this game rewards patience, planning, and brains over brawn. Rush in headfirst and you'll likely end up like the (real?) Perseus: dead as a door knob.

The game looks fantastic, from the opening screen to the beautiful level design. It's been a long time since I played a Spectrum game that looked so good I could hang it on my wall! The music is a tiny bit overbearing... but I can live with that. What I can't live with (literally) is the miserly ONE life you're given! For a game of this scale, at least a couple more would have been welcome!

I also found - though JB strongly disagrees with me here - that the controls are a bit fiddly and occasionally unresponsive. The long jump in particular, seems to work only when it feels like it, resulting in me plummeting gracelessly from great heights time and time again. More often than not, this ended with me landing directly in the path of a baddie who promptly zapped my remaining energy. Where's Pegasus when you need him?

So yes, this is a game that will probably split opinion. What can't be denied though is the sheer amount of ingenuity, care, and hard work that's gone into creating it.

And really - the fact that we are now in 2026 and are discussing whether or not a new Speccy release is a megagame or not? What a wonderful thing indeed.



Harpy-Go-Lucky

I don't think we did mythology at school, though my history teacher Ms Jones was something of a Gorgon. One minute she'd be as nice as Patricia Routledge, the next she could flip and give you a glare that would turn muscles to stone and bowels to gravy.

Perseus has the same epic feel of games like Castlevania and Sword Of Ianna, though unlike them it's not afraid to show a bit of eccentricity. Among the highly crafted realistic graphics you'll see touches of the cartoony and downright oldschool.

The controls are superb – that speed roll (or the green disk as Jamie is pleased to call it) is similar to the one in Sonic or Barbarian, and delivers the same little dopamine hit. We've probably all got too familiar with platform gaming, so handling Perseus is bound to feel unfamiliar. Be sure to watch Retrobensoft's trainer video before you start.

However, even knowing the tricks and using the carefully placed power ups, it still feels like it's Game Over all too quickly. I'd prefer a slower rate of energy loss, but at least everything else is done so well that it's no chore to restart. There are two possible endings for Perseus, one of which is fiendishly clever. And hard as it is, a game this special is worth spending time on, even if you need a bit of help from the ~~snapshots~~ Gods.

The Rebirth of Cthulhu

CarlosITV

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44631

PWYW / €2

¡Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn!

Sorry - bit of phlegm stuck in my throat. I've coughed it up now.

The Rebirth of Cthulhu is a platform game where you must navigate eerie catacombs and recover the ten lost pages of the Necronomicon. To do this, you'll also need to find little blue keys that extend the map - all the while avoiding strange Lovecraftian nasties and 'orrible green slime. Eugh!

By some "dark order of Cthulhu," you've also left your weapons at home (bloomin' schoolboy error), so you'll have to rely on just your wits to survive.

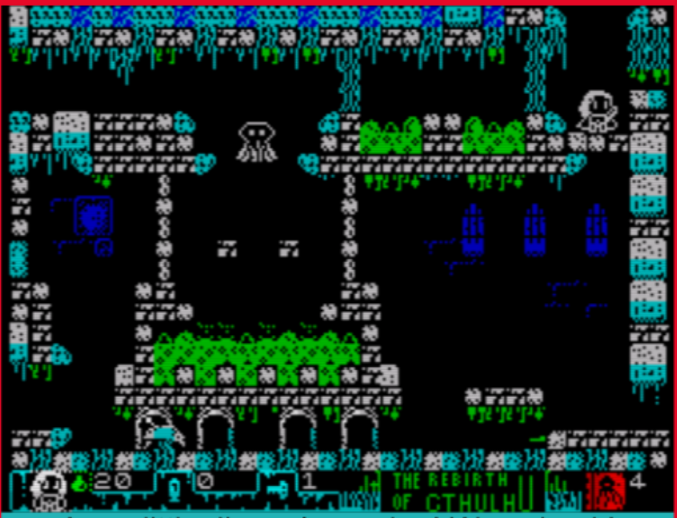
Now, being a bit of a H.P. Lovecraft aficionado myself, I shall continue this review in Lovecraft's style.

In an age of sterile diversions and mechanical amusements, The Rebirth of Cthulhu dares to awaken that ancient pulse of dread which lies coiled within the human spirit.

This infernal platform of pixel and pulse beats like a ritual drum beneath blackened waves — calling the player to traverse forbidden corridors, to seek the ten torn pages of the Necronomicon, and to escape the unspeakable will of the Dreaming One.

Without weapons, you are but flesh and fear — and fear, here, is your truest guide.

Right, that's enough of that. I'm giving myself the creeps. I'll continue in my own voice. Best for everyone.



Aww, little Jimmy's waving! Wave back!

If I have to comment on just three things : it's atmosphere, atmosphere, atmosphere! The game is full of it, and it does a brilliant job of evoking an eerie, Lovecraftian mood. The music suits the graphics perfectly too. I felt a creeping sense of unease playing this, and it wasn't just the after-effects of last night's lamb vindaloo!

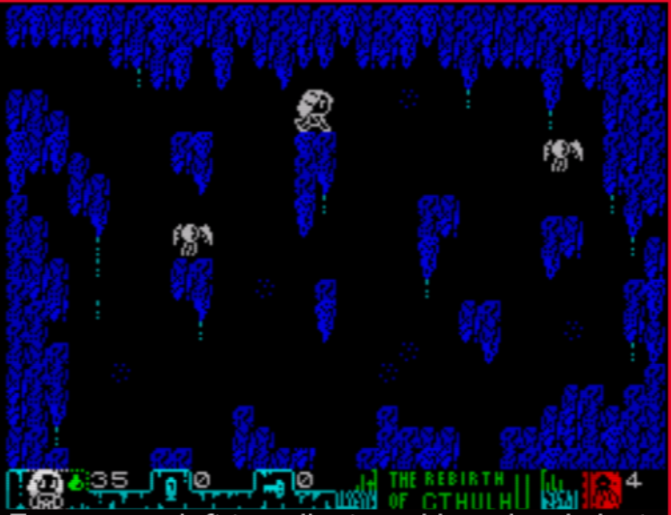
It's not all wine and roses, however (or celestial port and unnameable aromas, as HPL would say). A fair bit of backtracking is required, and I did get hopelessly lost a few times. There was one instance where I couldn't determine which way to go at all and had to call in help from the author on his itch.io page for directions! Some of the stones in the walls and platforms can be climbed or jumped through — but these are very hard to spot. The jump also feels a bit unnatural and can get frustrating at times.

Still, these are small niggles in a game that, for Lovecraft fans especially, is an intriguing and thoroughly playable platformer and a commendable entry into the Cthulhu lore. Overall, A jolly fun descent into pixelated insanity!

When I was invited to investigate another ZXGM Spectrum game, my apprehension was lessened by its Cthulhu theme. The subject is close to my heart. As I write this, my laptop rests on a copy of the Games Workshop Call of Cthulhu (3rd Edition). Arkham Cards from last night's game are still set out on the kitchen table, my Eldritch Horror board game sits in an upstairs cupboard, and a copy of the Necronomicon rests on a shelf in the lounge.

That said, I was skeptical. The Cthulhu Mythos, the world inspired by H.P. Lovecraft's work, is built on cosmic horror. It is a universe of unfathomable beings whose very existence reveals our own insignificance. This is not a theme that easily translates into a platform game where Cthulhu could be reduced to a patrolling "baddie" that just drains your health bar.

Despite this, Cthulhu Rebirth manages to be a genuinely cool game. It features strong pixel art and wonderfully atmospheric music that sets the mood. The core game play is maze exploration, where you hunt for keys to unlock doors and progress. As a ZXGM title, it delivers the expected experience, but it stands out with particular highlights like the clever trap blocks and diagonally firing cannon balls. It might not capture the existential dread of its source material, but it is a fun and well crafted arcade style challenge.



Four pages left to collect, and hopelessly lost.

Where to start with the works of thundering racist and author Howard Phillips Lovecraft? Hard to say - the quality varies wildly and his style is florid and arguably tiresome. But you can't go far wrong with *The Call of Cthulhu* : the story, the tabletop RPG and the 2005 silent movie adaptation, which your editor watched while hopped up on strong prescription flu medicine and still can't be sure wasn't a real thing that happened.

Peg Solitaire

WyeSoft / Matthew A. Wood

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44661

Free

I never knew what those peg board puzzles were called until the release of Peg Solitaire by Wyesoft; I'd spend hours at my maternal grandparents retirement home in Frodsham (Cheshire) engrossed in trying to solve this.

The best I did was to get two pegs remaining, and I invented my own rules which meant I could remove pegs if I could jump a piece diagonally, and the starting configuration was different, though this didn't help. I know now, thanks to this release, that my Grandad had the English board. It presents other configurations. I've alluded to the rules proper, so let me explain further.

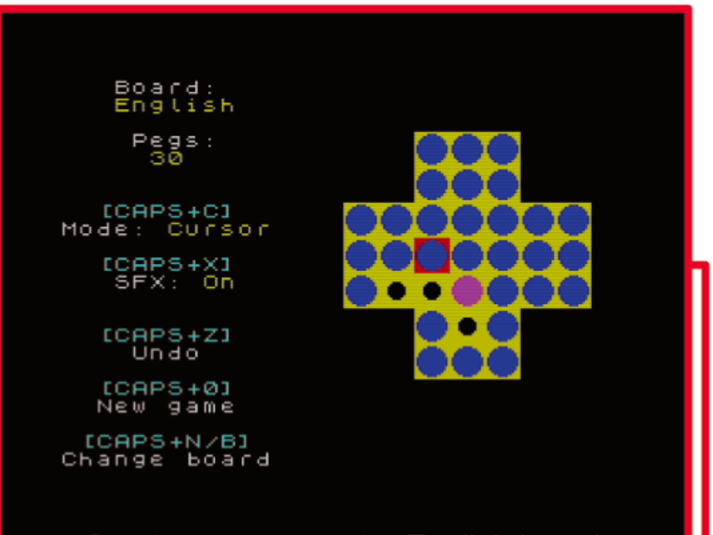
You have a tiled board, with each tile holding one peg. And you have as many pegs as tiles, minus one. So, on the English set up, there are 32 pegs and 33 spaces in a symmetrical plus configuration (fun fact: the English board is considered as the easiest of all variants). Each peg may jump over another directly above or below it, or to either of its sides, as long as the space next to the peg to be jumped is empty. Once a peg has been 'jumped' then it is removed from play. Continue until you can make no more moves, with the object being to leave one peg only; extra points if that is in the middle of the board.

We have here a classic puzzler for the ages on the ZX Spectrum, and one I don't recall seeing any versions of, though the SpectrumComputing archives tell of a missing in action titled called "Peg in the Middle" for the 16K Speccy, and a version released for the ZX80 from 1982, and a puzzle game called Pegged by Under4Mhz, released in 2023. There are lots of versions of the card game of the same name though.

Anyway, this has me hooked again. Maybe I can finally finish it with just one peg remaining this time. So far, my best is two, so I'm still making the same mistakes I did back in the 1980s. (And that's on the supposedly more difficult French board)

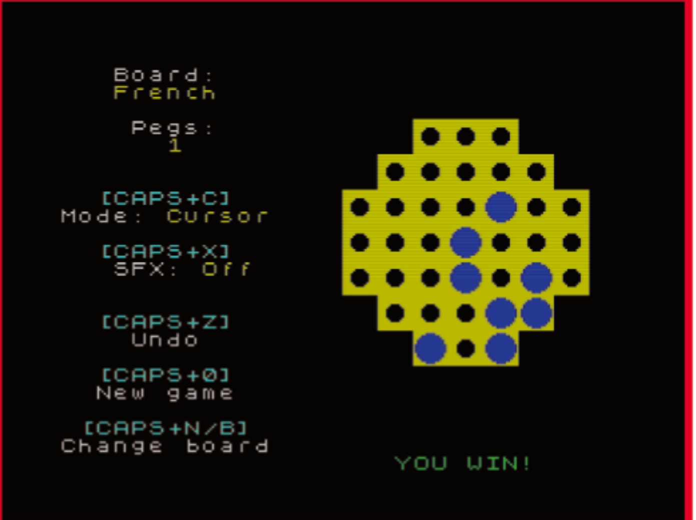
.

As one might expect for this sort of game, the graphics are functional, as that is all that is needed, and sound is optional and also very simple. Although perfectly playable, I am noticing some issues with the keyboard scanning routines, at least on Fuse, whereby the game starts to move by itself. Ghosts in the Machine? (An excellent read by Mel Croucher, by the way). But, if you like engaging your brain in a timeless teaser, this is for you. See if you can beat me to getting a single peg remaining or, to show off, remaining in the middle of the board. You know you want to.



```
Board:
English

Pegs:
30

[CAPS+C]
Mode: Cursor

[CAPS+X]
SFX: On

[CAPS+Z]
Undo

[CAPS+0]
New game

[CAPS+N/B]
Change board
```

Starting moves on the English board



```
Board:
French

Pegs:
1

[CAPS+C]
Mode: Cursor

[CAPS+X]
SFX: Off

[CAPS+Z]
Undo

[CAPS+0]
New game

[CAPS+N/B]
Change board

YOU WIN!
```

I mean, if you say so…

Unlike Shaun, I did know what this was called, but, like Shaun, I never could complete it. Until, that is, about 2023, when I visited my post-Covid family, who had spend lockdown breaking out a variety of dusty old puzzles and learning to solve them. I came away from that short trip with the solution to both Solitaire and the Rubik's Cube at my fingertips.

But while I can still rearrange your 6 faces in under 2 minutes, I've forgotten how to complete Solitaire. The one which Shaun assures me is the 'easy' one.

Bugger.

It's ultimately pointless to review the mechanics of a game like this - people have been playing it since at least the 1600s, and I feel like that counts as 'standing the test of time'. No need to be so smug, chess players. If you like logic / spatial puzzles, you'll like this, and indeed have likely played it at some point.

So instead we're just commenting on the implementation, which is pretty solid. Shaun did manage to break it by moving pegs back after removing another peg (See screenshot), but the issue with the keyboard getting stuck seemed to happen only in Fuse for me. In any case, there is a grid-entry control method available as an alternative, which put me in mind of Battleships somewhat.

There are 11 variations here, so even if you've have learned one solution, you'll not be short of a fresh challenge. And by the time you figure out the 11th, I bet you'll have forgotten how to do the 1st. Potentially infinite entertainment, if you want to look at it that way.

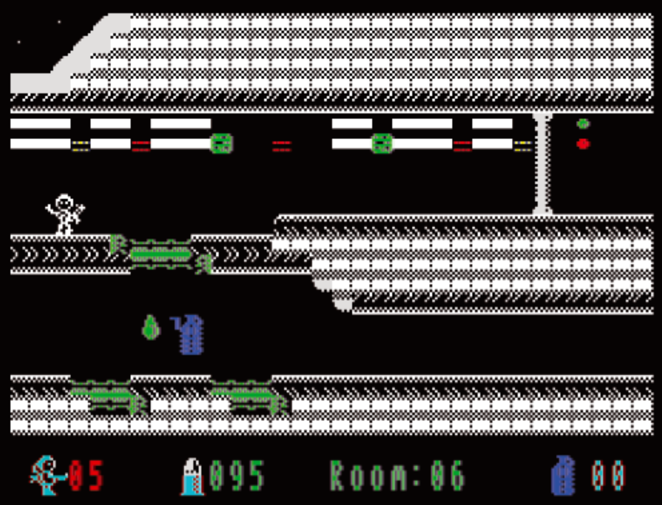
Alien Attack (1 & 2)

MANSoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45166 & 45167

PWYW / $2

The gritty and somewhat epic sci-fi film Alien has inspired many great fan art and fan made games; the Aliens: Neoplasma games are some of my favourites. When Dave pointed out that Alien Attack and its sequel, by Mansoft, have been released recently, I hacked into the office MU/TH/ER (A QL with passwords taped to the underside) and assigned both games to myself.



A jolly wave from our hero

In Alien Attack, you are a lone survivor named RIPP; your ship has been infested with Aliens who now roam about freely. Due to the ferocity of these new sentient organisms, the only option is to destroy the whole ship along with all life forms on board. And to do this, Oxygen canisters must be collected along with a self destruct device.

This first game has keys for up, jump and fire, and as someone who is used to using up for jump and climb, and space for fire, this got a little confusing at first. But it makes sense for these actions to be separated as much as it also doesn't make sense for them to be.

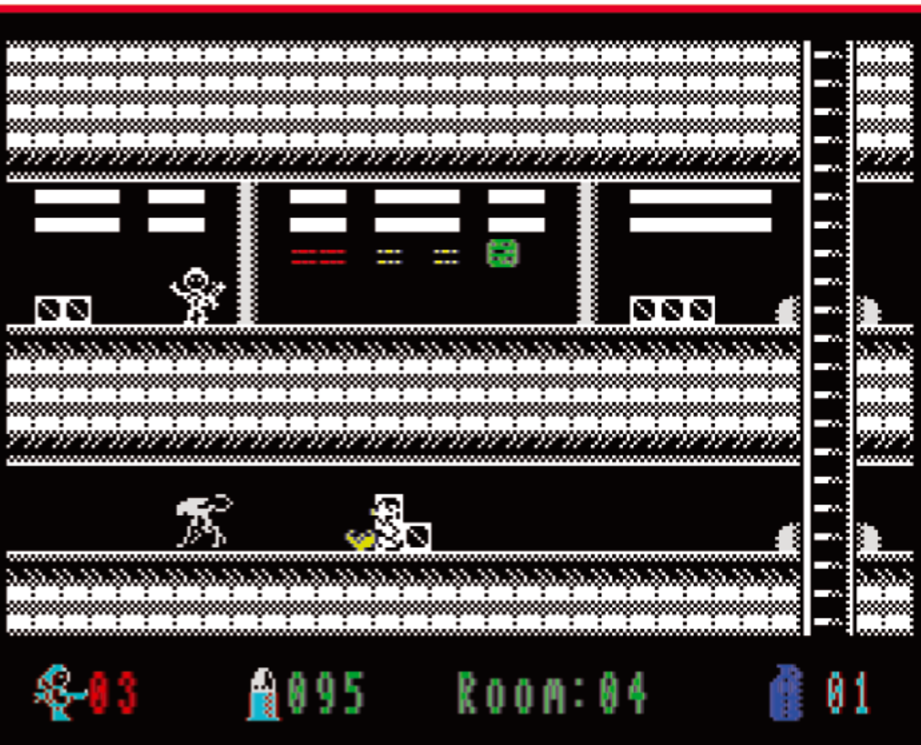
Throughout each deck of the ship, there are eggs and hatchlings to obliterate or avoid; this take on the Alien concept sees flying antagonistic scum as well. The issue here is that whilst RIPP is well armed, his supply of bullets is limited.

As each of the nasties require quite a few shots, it becomes important to preserve your armory and avoid where possible. With Aliens spawning and respawning, this becomes especially important. Here, I have a slight issue with the game; perhaps it's vogue to do this now, but I've found that walking onto a new screen means you're walking into an instant and fatal hazard. Most safe routes can be learned though. And I find that the collision detection is slightly off too at times.

With ten oxygen bottles to find, there is enough of a game here to keep you entertained to get you through the long winter months (in the Northern hemisphere).

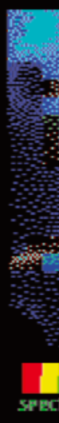
For its sequel, which is either Alien Attack 2: Invaded Colony, or Alien 2: Invaded Colony, depending on which title you read on itch.io, the controls have been somewhat simplified so that the up key is both up and jump. This time, you control a Space Marine called Hicks who is stationed on colony Fury-111, a place purpose built to conduct experiments with eggs found in far off locations of unknown origins. What could possibly go wrong? Of course, the answer is everything.

With the colony being lost, the evacuation order is given. Your escape is made easier by being better armed; purple cases can replenish your supplies, but must be shot to unlock, and these must be chased down to be collected. Unfortunately, this means that if you have run out of bullets, you're not able to rearm. So the same strategy is necessary in this sequel: preserve your firepower.



Dude, stop waving at me. There's an alien right there.

Overall, I think the sequel is marginally better here, but there's little in it. Mansoft has two solid releases here, which may be played independently of each other.



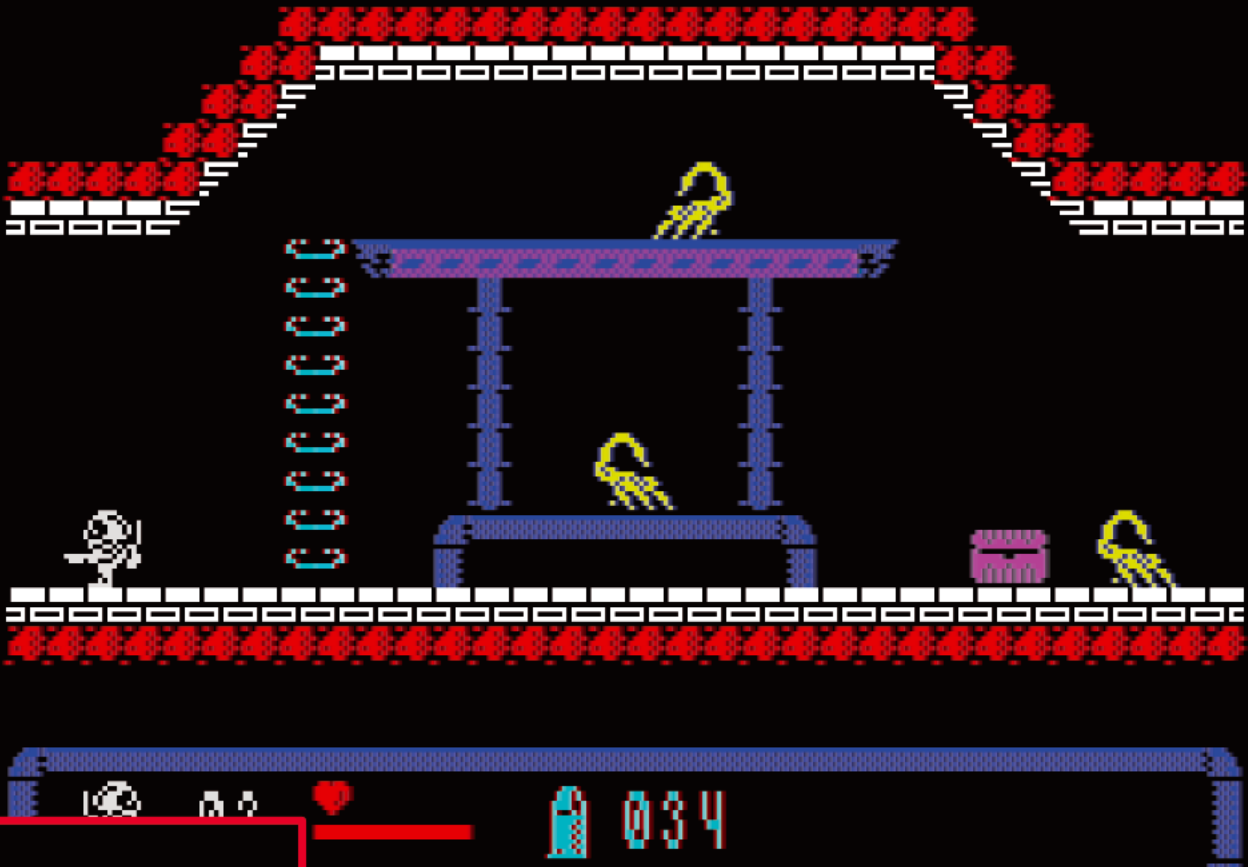
Ridley Scott's Alien is far better than James Cameron's sequel. Unpopular opinion? Perhaps. Alien has a proper story arc and is really about blue- and white-collar workers getting screwed by an AI that cleverly exploits the crew's humanity and emotions to keep them divided and infighting, all while exploiting them to death for corporate profit. On the other hand, Aliens' plot is more superficial, necessary only to hang the action on.

That brings me to 'Alien Attack' and 'Alien Attack 2,' an Alien-themed double bill by Mansoft. These are flip-screen platformers set in the Alien universe. The first game is the more thoughtful and better game (Sorry to disagree, Shaun!). The sequel is all guns blazing, with aliens flying all over the screen, but somehow misses some of the thoughtfulness of the original. To be honest, there isn't much in it!

Both games have some nice touches. Ammo is limited, and resupply stocks have a 100-second cooldown. Also, when you kill an alien, an acid pool takes its place as another deadly trap. Both of these ideas are really cool. The games are also thematic. Collecting oxygen tanks, blowing up the ship, and escaping in a life pod are all authentic elements that add narrative depth and a sense of purpose.

There are rough edges, too. In the second game, the resupply crates need to be shot in order to open them. If you've already run out of bullets, you're screwed. In the first game, collecting oxygen mid-jump freezes the character in midair, leaving you unsure what will happen when the game resumes (I tended to die due to the unpredictability).

There is plenty of innovation and creativity here to overcome the flaws, and it's good to be playing a set of games that feels different and unique. So, which game you prefer may come down to whether you're a Ridley or Cameron fan. But let's face it, it's quite nice to be spoilt for choice.



Free hugs!

ALIEN ATTACK /
INVADED COLONY
48K
MANSOFT

That 'y' is doing important work.

Mega Serpiente

CarlosITV

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44499

Free

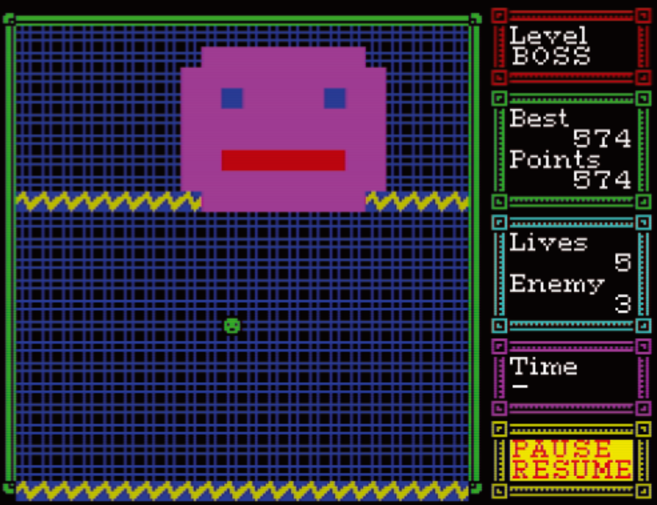
Oh! A Snake game… you know the sort. What? Do I have to explain it to you? Blim! You lot. It was difficult enough to adumbrate (haha! Ed won't like that)* Wartris (a Tetris clone) in BreakSpace issue 2, page 76.

Right, for everyone else, skip the next paragraph. But for you. Yes you. Here is what I mean by "a Snake game". Also: welcome to planet Earth. And no, we will not take you to our leaders, as they're a bit of an embarrassment at the moment.

Snake: The concept I believe started sometime in the 1970s when computering was a new thing. You control an ever hungry (usually) and limbless slithering reptile in one of four directions (typically four, some variants allow for more directions). Eating a food pellet sees this creature grow in length, and as this happens, more of the level is taken up by said creature. Avoid everything but the food items, and keep moving in one of four directions, dragging the ever growing body behind you in a seamless fashion. I think this explains it well enough.

There are usually two main variants of Snake: one is a game until you run out of space and perish. The other actually has levels and things to do. MEGA SERPIENTE mostly follows the principles of the latter, but there's more.

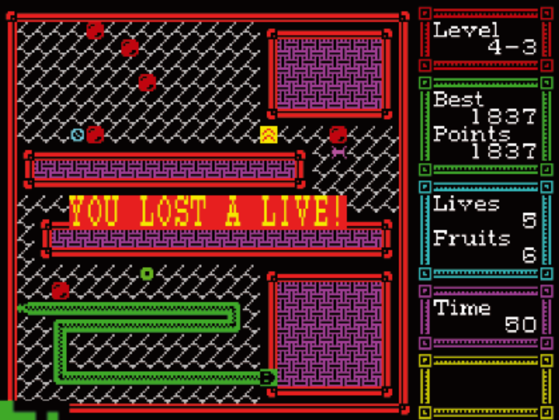
This borrows from other games; in a Breakout stylee, there is a "boss" level to contend with at the end of the second "world" (yep, here's a snake game which has levels split into worlds). Your snake becomes like a Breakout bat: the object is to avoid the projectiles dropped at you, or at least avoid eating any of them, and to bounce them back to dissipate the bosses energy. And with plenty of lives, it gives you a lot of chances to get to this point. I did so first try, and I can't even play games.



A Boss level. Maybe cute isn't the word, but hardly intimidating

Overall, this is a Snake game that's full of surprises, with a very gentle, super soft difficulty and learning curve, and whilst this might be for wimps, playing through the earlier levels doesn't become too tiresome either. I mean, in 2025, we all know what a save state is anyway if those initial forays into this game become a chore. Snake fans will love this one, and those who are not so fond might even find something to like too.

*Shaun is correct - Ed.



Life and let die

We all know that Snake games are ten a penny on the Speccy, we also know however that the simple but fun gameplay is exactly the sort of thing we adore here at Break Space. Having been thoroughly charmed by ZXnake in Issue 3, is there room in our hearts for another Snake variant to wriggle into? Well slither hither and I'll tell you…spook! (A little Roy Jay reference for the kids out there, you'll all be doing it tomorrow!).

Mega Serpentine is an extremely colourful game which, much like the aforementioned ZXnake, is coded in BASIC but runs like a dream. It also introduces hazards & retro references to ensure you don't grow bored chasing your tail.

I'm not sure if it was the fault of the hardware, software or user error, but it did seem at times to be a little unresponsive at just the wrong time. The game is so charming though, I soon learned how to adjust my inputs accordingly to minimise the occurrences of the adorably Wronglish "you lost a live" message.

As you progress you will encounter some clever ideas like bonus levels based on the original, speed ups and a couple of boss battles that keep you charging through to see what's around the next corner. Although the hazards are frustrating at times, the generous 16 lives should mean that after a few goes you should get to see everything that is on offer in each sub stage across the 4 main stages, until you finally beat that weird frog at the end.

If you only play one Snake game this year, then play ZXnake. If you do however, prepare to feel very silly, because Mega Serpentine is also a corker of a title that you'll be fangful you tried out.

BASIC Tower

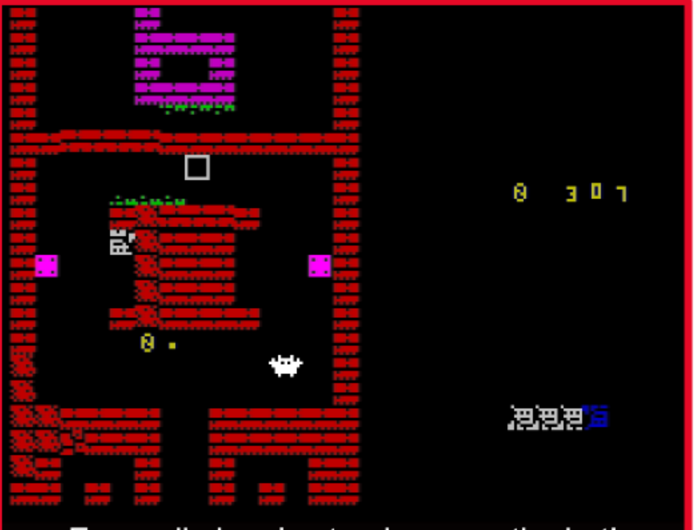
Ignacobo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44683

Free

Hundreds of years ago, you would have been burnt at the stake for witchcraft such as Basic Tower.

I sit here, scrambling to pick up my jaw from the floor. When I was tasked with reviewing this BASIC version of Old Tower, I was not exactly excited. Another clunky BASIC game, hamstrung by the Spectrum's worst flaws - slow, unresponsive, silent - or worse, ugly discordant beeps that pause the action because the computer can't run a game and make your ears bleed at the same time. It has to do one, and then the other. I've reviewed many such games in 2023 as host of the Crap Game Comp. Was this to be my fate, yet again?



Every climbers' natural enemy, the bat!

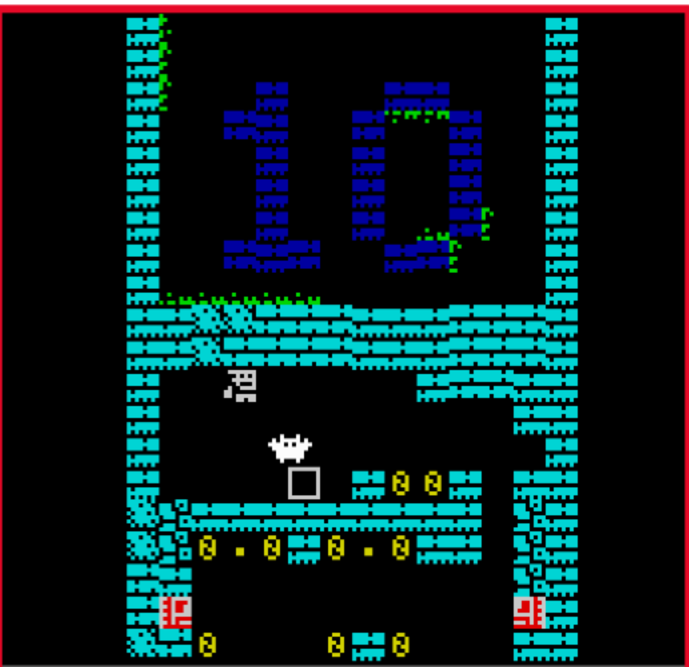
Well, no. Because Basic Tower is a charmer. The mad thing is, I enjoy it more than the original! That's a controversial opinion, but the spectacle of playing a very good game in BASIC gives it an edge. It's like seeing cinema for the first time - magical.

There is in-game music that sounds great. There are a few tunes. One is from Ocarina of Time, and one sounds like the Game of Thrones theme. The music is better than, say, Jet Set Willy. But how is this possible? Well, the action is not quite as smooth as JSW, which allots a tiny moment for each note. Basic Tower has longer notes, and this pause sets the meter of the gameplay. This gives all the movement in the game its heartbeat.

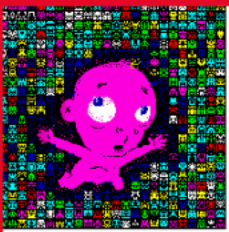
But what is particularly impressive (and hard to convey in words and pictures) is the scrolling of the levels. YES, the level scrolls up and down. OK, this isn't 50FPS, butter-smooth movement. But it is vertical scrolling in a BASIC game. That's not just impressive - it's witchcraft!

The lovely approach to graphics enhances the experience further. The walls have a higgledy-piggledy nature that compliments the scrolling routine, making the game's action seem more complex than it really is. It's a neat trick by someone with an affinity for the Spectrum's weaknesses and the practical solutions that overcome them.The gameplay is classic Old Tower - collect the gold coins, avoid the bats and bullets, and progress up the tower. OK, it's slower than the original, but the game is responsive and fun. The slower speed is not a deal breaker. It simply gives you a little more time to marvel at the spectacle.

Before I run off to recommission the ducking stool, grab my pitchfork, and hurriedly form, with my bewildered neighbours, into a baying mob, I will say Basic Tower is a great game and an exciting achievement that you simply must play. Now, where was I? Oh, yes - Burn them! Burn the witch!



Getting there…



It looks like we'll have to get used to BASIC games being good now. The Bytemaniacos competition seems to be the springboard for the recent paradigm shift in development. The technique of exploiting the DEFADD system variable and DEF FN to copy graphics quickly on screen is becoming more common. We saw it last issue in ZXMoe's coding tips, and we see it here in BASIC Tower's fast screen scrolling. It sounds brainmelting to code, so it's even more impressive to see all the polish that IgnaCoBo has managed as well.

The levels loosely follow the original, so there are quite a lot of handholding levels where you wonder what the challenge is. There are no mirrors or one-way blocks, so there is a bit less scope for designing, but levels 10 & 13 are delicious and show that some real depth is possible.

I wouldn't say this is more enjoyable than the original, but BASIC Tower is about as enjoyable in a different way. I suppose in the same way we choose to play games on an odd-forty-odd year old computer. It reinforces the idea that you don't need a super slick multicolour engine for a good game. It's nice to have, but it needs the sturdy foundation of a playable concept, and both BASIC and Old Tower are handsome erections to that.

Now then, I've got a baying mob to join. Bloody hell—Jamie's taken my pitchfork.

Lopezno's Back / Wolverbean's Back

Ángel Lastre

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44642

Free

In my humble opinion, Wolverine is the best X-Man. Full stop. *(NERD! - Ed.)* While pretty-boy Cyclops was busy giving speeches and missing with his eye-beams, this guy was solving problems. The solution was always the same: adamantium and a bad attitude. He was a hero who felt pain, embodied hard luck, but fought selflessly for his unappreciative friends. What's not to love?

But, while the real Wolverine tears baddies to pieces to keep his friends together, the game 'WolverBean is Back' threatened to tear friendships and professional relationships apart, all thanks to its ambiguous nomenclature.

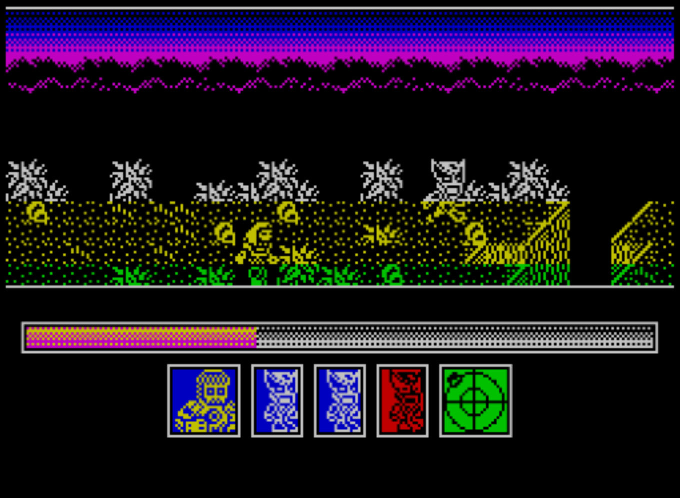
To be clear, the argument that raged in Break Space Towers isn't entirely the fault of the game's author, but rather, our own blunders and a deep confusion regarding the game's name and what may have been lost in translation.

The row started when I loaded up a game officially titled Wolverbean's Back. My colleague, Dave, peered over my metaphorical monitor."Ah, Lobezno's Back!" he announced, with the smug certainty of a man who knows precisely two words in Spanish. "It's Wolverbean's Back, Dave," I said, pointing at the title screen. "But look at the sprite. He's… not a bean. He's a pixelated bad-ass. Why is he called Wolverbean?"

This single question opened a portal to madness. Dave, a self-appointed linguist, became obsessed with the Spanish title. "Lobezno! Maybe it's a pun? Lo-bean-o? Get it?!"

Mpk flung open his office door, disturbed by the rising noise. "Why are you two arguing about legumes? It's a video game. Review it." Slam.

But we couldn't. We were trapped in a semantic nightmare. Is the character a bean? No.
Does Lobezno sound like "beans"? Only if you say it after a mouthful of butterbeans. Is the translator a comedic genius playing 4D word-play chess, and we're just too dumb to understand? Possibly.



Logan's thinking about thos beans

The Great Bean Debate of Break Space Towers had begun. From that moment, the game existed in a quantum state. I was adamantium-level sure the game's hero was Wolverbean, while Dave rattled his sabre-tooth and insisted the game was 'Lobezno's Back'. Mpk just saw two idiots wasting company time and decided to end the madness by clarifying, with the weary tone of a university professor, "En español, el personaje de Wolverine de X-Men es conocido principalmente como Lobezno."

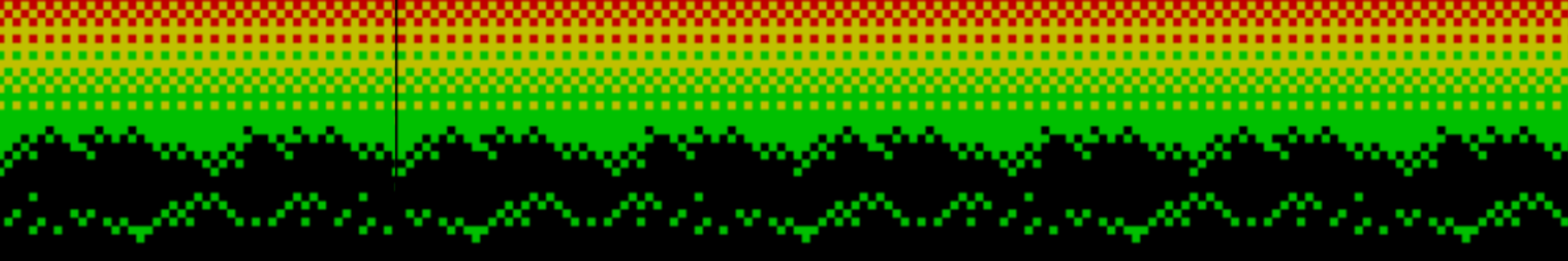
Well. That told us.

The game itself is as wonderfully weird as our existential crisis. It looks fantastic, like a lost Contra cartridge, but it plays with a deliberate, tense, and tight pace. It's less run-and-gun and more 'slow-motion jumps' and 'carefully-timed claws'.

The core mechanic is novel and fun. You can't just jump or attack; you must hold a button to charge every action. Hold Space to power up a jump. Hold 'S' to energise your claw. Your character stands there, gathering energy while enemies patrol, building a suspense that would make Hitchcock proud. It turns every encounter into a mini-game of nerve and timing.

So, once we stopped theorising and actually played it, we discovered an inventive game. In the end, Wolverbean's Back (or Lobezno's Back for you purists – Dave) is an impressive achievement. The 'bean' element of the name remains a glorious, unsolvable mystery. Maybe it's the most clever pun ever localised. We may never know.

Our final score is two claws up. Dave is now writing a thesis on culinary-based character naming conventions, and Mpk has mandated a company-wide ban on the word "legume." A resounding success.

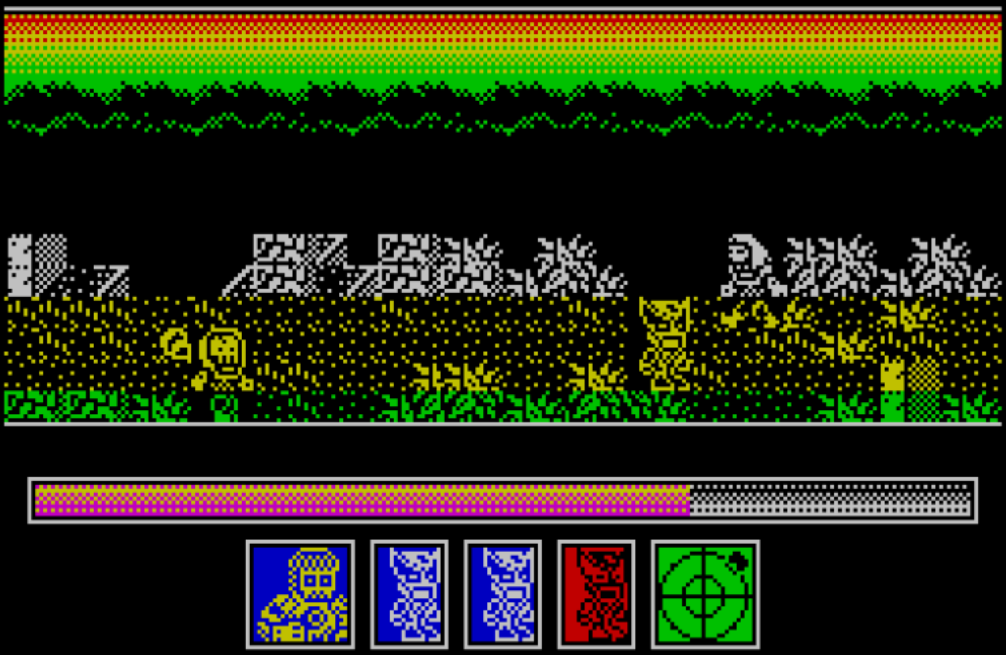


When I was asked to write a review for a game called Lopenzo's Back, an X-Men game was the last thing I expected to play. I half expected it to be about an old Spanish gardener with sciatica (there you go, Speccy developers — you can have that one for free!). I'm not much of a Marvel fan - in fact, everything I know about the X-Men could be written on the back of a postage stamp, but considering the price of stamps nowadays, I'd be better off tearing off a small piece of antique Egyptian golden parchment and scribbling "sod all" on the back of that instead.

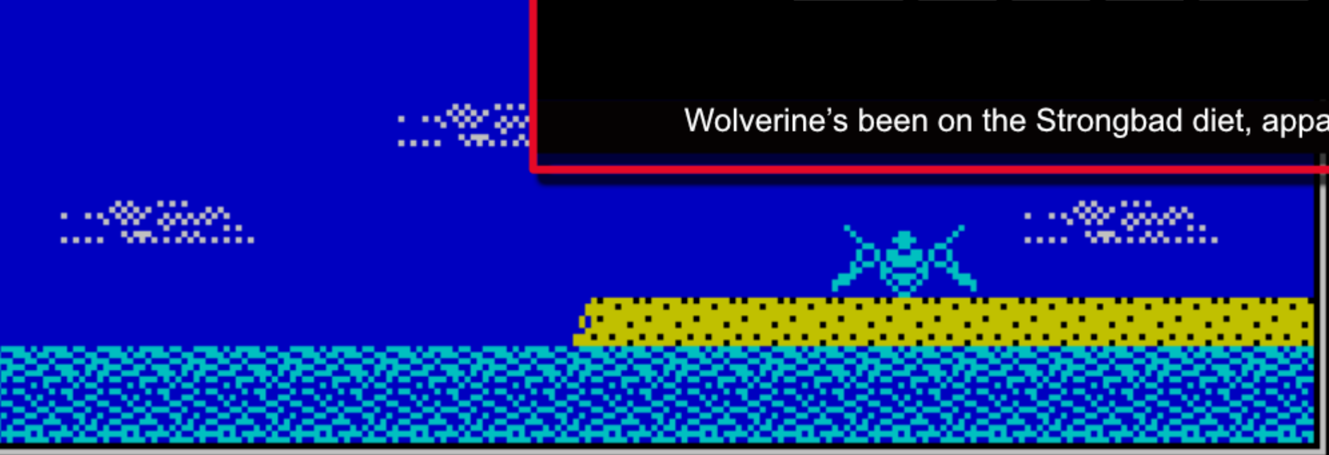
There was a bit of confusion here at BreakSpace Towers about the game's name, and I've learned something from the squabble. Wolverine in Spanish is Lobezno. But this game's Spanish title is Lopenzo's Back (note the 'P') - so obviously he's trying to dodge the same copyright issues in Spain as he is by calling Wolverine "Wolverbean." Phew - glad that's sorted out!

Before you start the game, it's worth pressing 2 and watching the "History" — a comic-strip style prologue that sets the scene beautifully. The plot takes you to Genosha (a place I couldn't find on Google Maps) in search of a stolen shipment of Asbestium — which I'm assuming is a fancy name for asbestos. Better get that back from the terrorists pronto, before they unleash all those harmful fibres into the air!

Gameplay involves long-pressing your Claw button to attack enemies, and long-pressing the Jump button to traverse the many ravines you encounter. The claw attacks feel a bit drawn out and take some getting used to. Personally, I'd prefer some quick hack-and-slash action but that's just me. For a BASIC game, the graphics are terrific, and if you're a fan of the X-Men, and Wolverine in particular, you could do a lot worse than give this a try! "THE POWER IS YOURS!" (That was Wolverine, wasn't it?)



Wolverine's been on the Strongbad diet, apparently.



The Locked Room

Red Zebra

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45149

Free

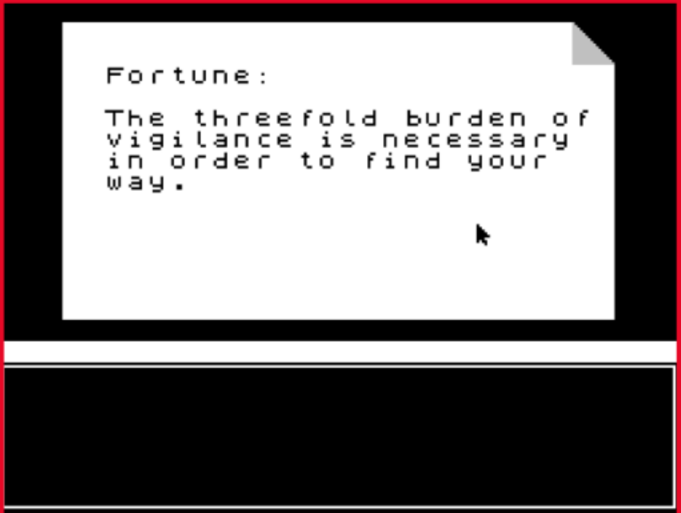
Right. Let us get this out of the way: I am, at the best of times, a man who considers remembering where I left my own shoes a minor intellectual triumph. The modern world has perfected a special kind of brain wipe, leaving you feeling like a forgetful ghost haunting your own life. So, the premise of The Locked Room—waking up with no memory, trapped by your own devious, past self—felt less like a game and more like a typical Monday morning.

Picture me, if you will: another late night in Breakspace Towers. My mind, a numb and passive thing after a day of digital drudgery. Little more than a tired ghost in a dark room, I was not ready for a mind-melting puzzler. Or so I thought.

The game's premise: You have locked yourself in your own flat. The spare key is hidden somewhere. You cannot remember where, because you have the memory of a concussed goldfish. Instead of, say, writing a note, you have turned your home into an elaborate escape room to punish your future, forgetful self. It is a beautifully stupid idea, and it is all the story that is needed to set the stage.

There are worse rooms to be trapped in on the Spectrum. This one is particularly lovely looking. RedZebra has wrangled the Spectrum's famously chunky attributes into four main screens that feel like a proper place, with real character. There are close-ups for poking and prodding, which give the game a sense of depth and a sensation that draws you into the investigation.

The gameplay, puzzles and interface are all extremely well considered. Particularly the interface, which is a masterstroke of intuitive design. A glidey cursor and a simple 1 to 5 key system for using inventory will leave you wondering why all game UIs cannot be this intuitive and simple.



Fortune:

The threefold burden of vigilance is necessary in order to find your way.

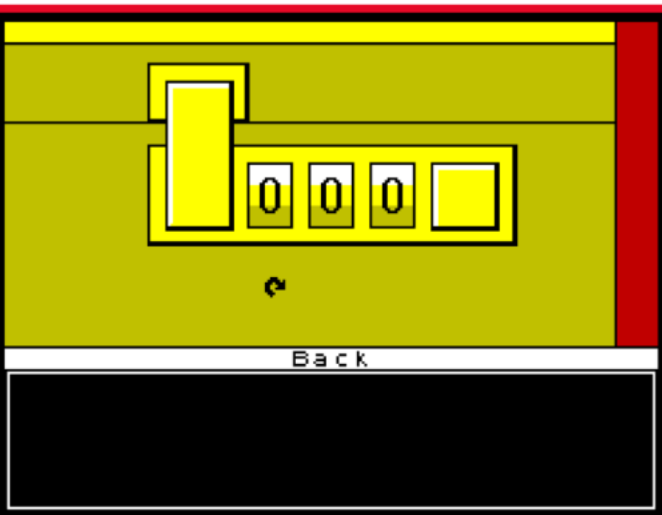
If you say so

The puzzles are fun, taxing but do not outstay their welcome—a mix of things hidden in plain sight, objects that must be used in an unusual way, and a couple of great logic puzzles that are really the game's core. These felt like the wake-up my grey matter had been waiting for. The game woke me up; I felt engaged.

The transformation from sleepy reviewer to obsessed puzzle fanatic took about an hour. In that time, the fog lifted. The passive, zombified office worker was gone, replaced by something sharper, hungrier. I could not rest until I had escaped the locked room! My mind, it turned out, was not broken and dull like I thought it was at the start. It was just bored. This game was not an escape room; it was a defibrillator for my noggin.

The Locked Room is a magnificent small game. It found me at a low mental ebb and, through sheer craft and cleverness, reminded me what my brain is for. Not for absorbing, but for solving. Not for scrolling, but for seeking. The final click that opened the pixelated door echoed in the silent room.

And that is when I saw the real puzzle. The game's true challenge is not in the flat. It is what lies beyond that open door. The adventure is not finding a key; it is remembering you have legs. The real escape my soul yearns for is not from a room, but from the comfortable, numbing cage of passive modern life. This brilliant little Spectrum game did not just entertain me for an hour. It handed me back my own mind, sharp and thirsty. And that might be the greatest puzzle of all.



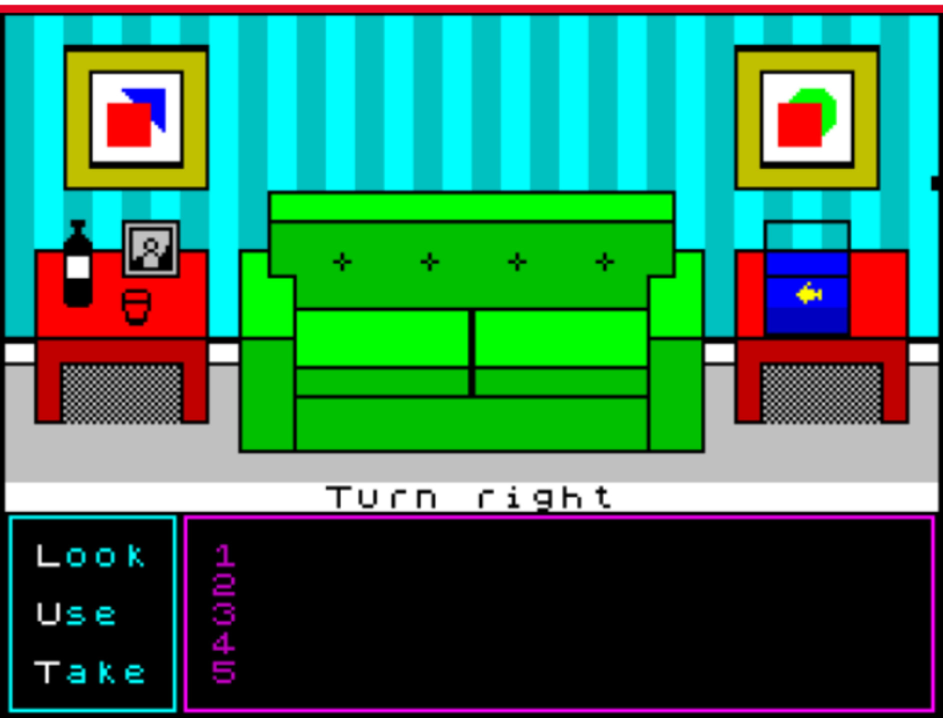
Not the same as my phone PIN then

It shouldn't come as a surprise that a game by Red Zebra—author of Hafoc Tor and Wycheweald—is rather good indeed. If anything is surprising, it's how well he can turn his hand to so many different genres.

The scenes are so stylish and play to the Spectrum's strengths with clean lines and use of PAPER colours. Even more impressive is the interface, which manages complex actions with optimal simplicity. It works well with rubber keys and joystick, but it's worth playing with Kempston mouse—either emulated or real if you're lucky enough to have one.

Although I had some long periods without success, the puzzles were so gripping that I didn't feel the same sense of hopelessness that text adventures often give me. My main barrier to progress was not examining things diligently, so be sure to Look, Use and Take absolutely everything, even if it feels silly.

I was going to say that The Locked Room didn't give me quite the same holistic epiphany as Jamie, but maybe that's exactly what it did. I was so engrossed and invigorated that I was furiously scribbling ideas in notebooks, using my shatterproof ruler to measure the map, and thinking about compass bearings while falling asleep. This game got me thinking outside the lockbox.



Sat Nav's gone wrong, I feel.

Another title, like Crabby is Back and Dr Jim's ZXmas quiz, that was released for Christmas as a little community bonus. On RedZebra's itch site, it's listed on a page of 'small' and 'unpolished' projects alongside his CSSCGC entries.

And yet.

Our favourite stripey horse has put together a better pointy-clicky game engine that we've ever seen on the Spectrum. There hasn't been a huge amount of competition in that arena, it's true, but the UI here is miraculously clear and functional. From minute one I barely thought about it, which is what you want from an interface.

The plot of the games is, as Jamie points out, complete madness. The protagonist does appear to live in an Escape Room and notes scattered about suggest that he's lost his key before and puzzling his way out of a morning is a regular part of the day, like doing a Sudoku or playing a few rounds of Operation Bee (Hi Sloany!) over breakfast. Or maybe that's just how boffins live. Is this how Red Zebra lives? Each to their own, I s'pose.

The puzzles are pretty great - not super difficult, but very engaging, with plenty of red herrings along the way to distract you. There's a lot packed into this one room and its four screens, but everything seems linked to something else and I was never stuck for long. I went repeatedly from dejection to air-punching triumph a few times during the hour it took me to get out. Quite a packed hour, you'll agree.

So the only reservation hanging over this one is that it's over and done in 60 minutes. Is that enough?

When it's an hour of concentration and puzzling unhindered by any of the interface / parser issues that have traditionally impaired games like this on the Spectrum, I'd say it's more than enough. In fact, it may be the perfect length. That's how long you get in most physical escape rooms, after all.

I can only hope that RZ takes the engine here and uses it to build out more projects. Whether they be more small games like this one, or larger titles with narratives to match, I'm on board. I don't know if this can compete with a kilogram of nuts as the best present we got here at the Towers, but it's right up there.

It Belongs in a Museum!

The ZX Load museum in Portugal recently celebrated its 5th anniversary.

Mpk grabbed his fedora and whip and spoke to founder and CEO João Diogo Ramos about the museum's formation and future.

BreakSpace : Thanks for fitting us into your busy schedule. I believe you're just back from a trip for the museum?

João Diogo Ramos : Yes, I was just in Spain, challenged by another museum to work on a a joint project. And last week was the Lisboa Games Week event.

BS : How did you get started with the Spectrum?

JDR : I was born in 1978, too young for the Spectrum when it launched in 1982, but I got one aged 7 or 8, thanks to an uncle who was an amateur radio guy. People who were into radio were also generally into electronics. He pitched my parents on the idea that I needed a Spectrum to learn about computers. I had started learning English as well quite early, which helped a little when I did get the Spectrum at that age.

BS : I guess like most of us you had favourite games at the time?

JDR : I don't consider myself an expert in games, but my experience in Portugal was based on what was available, and that mostly meant piracy. These were professional-looking copies, with colour-printed inlays and so on. We didn't know they were pirated. But even the radio stations here would broadcast games in the early morning; In the museum, we have a recording from one radio station playing the tape for Ocean's Moon Patrol over the air. And if you were very lucky with the reception, you could record it.

sinclair
ZX Spectrum
PROGRAMA DE APRESENTAÇÃO

João outside the museum. He isn't very tiny, those are large models of the tape and Spectrum.

I played many games, of course. Pheenix was maybe the first one I played. Pyjamarama - I had the version with the popcorn song which I believe got withdrawn. I love Jumping Jack, and our sound effect on the museum Youtube videos is inspired by that. I loved High Noon, 1942, Commando.
I loved beat-em-ups, like Target Renegade, Double Dragon and Tiger Road, which might have been the first game I bought in the shop myself. I remember seeing Robocop for the first time and thinking that things couldn't get better than that. And Chuckie Egg of course, which was much bigger here than Manic Miner. When we did a Hall of Fame vote here for the last 2 years, Chuckie Egg won the first year, and Target Renegade the second.
I never really enjoyed text adventures, although I had a good time with the Fighting Fantasy gamebooks at the time. There was almost no Portugese label at the time. Gremlin published Alien Evolution in 1987, but that was the first time that a Portugese game was published internationally

And did you learn to program, like your uncle suggested?
I grew up with it, and learned a little. I learned some BASIC, but never any machine code or ASM. I was self-taught until I went to University, where I learned BASIC, GWBASIC, Pascal as part of a degree in Computer Sciences.

BS : This seems a common path for people who started their careers from the back of their hobby computers.

JDR : The Spectrum here was a very peculiar phenomenon. There aren't any statistics, but we generally agree that about 90% of the market here was Spectrum. At the time Portugal was quite a poor country, coming out of a dictatorship in 1974. The fact that the Spectrum was assembled here by Timex Portugal was very important. All that contributed to the Spectrum being the most low cost computer available. Unlike what happened in Britain, we didn't have the range of options here. We had some Commodore, but machines like the Dragon, BBC, even MSX weren't really a factor. Almost everyone who had a computer had a Spectrum, before migrating to Amiga or sometimes Atari ST in the 90s.

BS : And was that because of the Timex connection?

JDR : Yes. Timex Portugal assembled the Spectrum, plus they also developed some licensed clones, such as the Timex 2048 and 2068. But assembling the standard 48k was done here - that's what I had. 2 of them, in fact. The first one died - the computer shop told me the ULA was broken. I didn't know what that was, but it seemed like the only option was to get another one. So I had the 'Rubberkeys', which is why I remain passionate about Sinclair. Part of what makes our museum unique is not just the Sinclair story, but the Timex Portugal story.

BS : Timex are better known for their watches in the UK

JDR : Timex are watch manufacturers since 1854. When Clive needed a partner in 1981 to assemble the ZX81, he went to Timex, who invested in the Timex Dundee site to manufacture the units there for the British market. They also negotiated the rights to manufacture and sell their own versions in foreign markets with their own branding. What they really wanted was the US market. They had an engineering team in Cupertino who started thinking about how to launch under the Timex Sinclair brand.

A Timex 2068, part of the museum collection

They had a unit in Portugal - this site had up to 3000 employees under the dictatorship, but had been reduced to under 100. The new general manager there, Antonio Gomes, started pitching the idea to use the Portugal site to produce machines for the US market.
So there was a quickly an engineering team in the US coordinating with the team in Portugal, who were themselves building up the competencies they needed to do R&D work.

Eventually, they developed the Timex Sinclair 2000, which is essentially a ZX81 with 2kb of memory. Then the TS 1500 was a ZX81 with 16kb of RAM, but which looked like a Spectrum. This was designed by the Portuguese team. Then the TS 2068 was created in the US with no design involvement from the Portugal team.

One year after, Timex US withdrew from the computing market entirely. But Timex Portugal was happy with their position. They adapted their lines to build the TS-2068 and TS-2048, and, critically, they got permission to export computers to Poland. This was very difficult, due to the Iron Curtain splitting eastern and western Europe. They manufactured floppy drives for the Spectrums and so on. One great exhibit at the museum is a collection of all the Telex messages between Timex US and Timex Portugal - we have all of those archived. There's a TV documentary on Portuguese TV, subtitled in English which goes the story in more detail.

BS : It feels like Timex Portugal were doing more development of the Spectrum than Sinclair was for several years.

JDR : Maybe not more, but certainly an equal amount in parallel. And fighting with Sinclair too over some things. Timex were making floppy discs, while Sinclair was trying to make the Microdrive. But Timex went with 3" discs instead of the 3 1/2" standard. It was a really interesting period, although we were too young to realise at the time.

BS : At that time, everything was new and no-one really know what would work and what wouldn't. It looks obvious in hindsight that the 3.5" disk was the dominant format, but not so back then

JDR : Ah, but they knew at Timex that the 3" drive wasn't the best format! We have this recorded from an interview. They knew 3.5 was the best bet, technically. But they had an option to buy a large number of 3" drives cheaply because of issues at the supplier, so they took that option.

BS : That's fascinating, and the kind of story that the museum gets to unearth and archive.

JDR : You know, you asked me about my story with the Spectrum, and in a way that doesn't matter. My experience is very like many others, maybe like yours and we probably have 20 friends who can say the same. But at one point, I had a big collection and I needed space. I thought maybe that City Hall could benefit.

BS : So, how does someone go about starting a museum? It's a peculiar thing to do!

JDR : I have always thought that if you don't have something, you can create it yourself. I saw this with my father and his friends- they created a newspaper. A radio station. Many other things. I grew up in a small town. When I wanted to learn and practice karate, I started a dojo. I wanted to play table tennis, so I had to create a team. Once I had my degree in Computer Science, I went to work in startup companies. All my life was in startups, and in startups you create things.

Some years ago, I gave an interview to a Portugese newspaper where I said that I was part of the Spectrum Generation. What I meant by that was that I had a device as a child which forced me to learn how to code. I didn't have a machine like a Nintendo or a MegaDrive where I could push in a cartridge and play. Even having to enter a LOAD "" command was exposure to computing. This was the magic that led me on to a career in IT. And this interview made me conscious that the Spectrum was very important. I had a few Sinclair items in the attic at that point, but I didn't have a working Spectrum. And I'd had some collections of things when I was a kid, but nothing so important to me. So I started to collect. I remember telling my wife that I would never collect the calculators because there were so many.

I thought there were 5 or 6 computers. But then I started finding variants and clones and all the revisions of the boards. Computers and computers and computers, all here in my house. When friends would come to the house for dinner, we would show them the house, and eventually the room with all the computers. One day someone asked me about a particular Spanish computer and when I went to the shelf, I had to look back through 3 layers of computers to find it. I had too many to even display, and it wasn't right.

sinclair
electronic watch

Calculators? No, love, I don't have any of those. Check out my cool watch though.

So, I thought I had 2 options. Start selling some, which I hated the idea of, or find a clever way to deal with this. So, I thought there is a lot of interest about computers. Video games are everywhere, these are the first generation of popular home video games. For sure, I wasn't the only one thinking about these things. I'm not the kind of guy who doesn't want the computers to be touched, I'm fine with them being played with. I thought about approaching one of the cities' local government. Lisbon or Porto would be the obvious best locations, but I'm also from that history and mindset that as an entrepreneur, you should help to develop your own village. I worked in Coimbra, a larger city (pop. 105,000) but lived in Cantanhede - quite nearby, but much smaller (pop 36,000). Coimbra would have been the ideal, but when I wrote to both municipalities, only Cantanhede replied. They suggested finding a project that we could work on together and set up a meeting. This was in February 2019, and later that day I realised that the anniversary of the Spectrum was in April, and that gave me urgency. I wanted to get something done in less than 2 months.

So I set up a temporary exhibit in the local museum purely about Sinclair. 300 people came from outside the town, plus it was covered on national radio. The interest was certainly there. So the project grew, and grew in a way that 6 months later I went to the City Hall and told them that although our temporary project was coming to an end, I wasn't interested

MUSEU
LOAD ZX SPECTRUM

The museum isn't difficult to spot.

in taking the computers home again. They already had considered giving me a space to set up a permanent museum. So I started doing a proper business plan, and realised that this would be the first permanent museum dedicated to the Spectrum in the world. There had been an Italian guy named Enrique Taderci who had an exhibition in Brighton at one point. He was a collector of Marconi and Sinclair. But he passed away and his collection was sold.

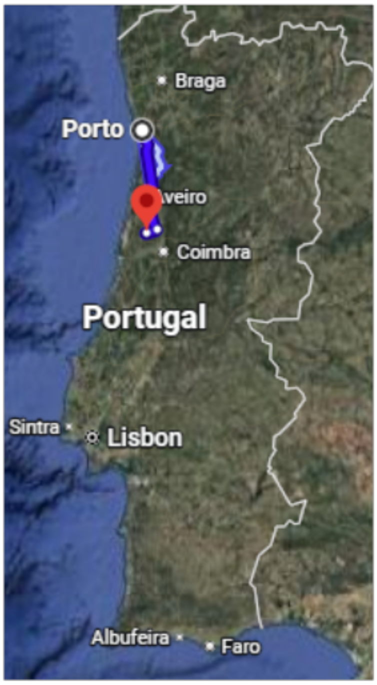
I had been to some computing museums in 2017 back in Cambridge and in the UK. And while they were bigger and nicer than what we had here, they had a much broader focus. I was there for Clive Sinclair, and was less interested in other figures, even though they were of course important. It's like a football club : do you want to visit a museum about football, or about your club? They are very different. And I think we'd mostly like to see our own club's history.

So we call it a Spectrum museum, although it's not strictly Spectrum-focused. But we cannot call it a Sinclair museum. Sinclair is not the strong brand here that it is in the UK, and we didn't want to push away the Timex people either. We don't call it a Sinclair Spectrum here - we say Spectrum, or, more often, a 48k. And even if you had a Timex clone, you still would call it a 48k. That covers everyone. So we settled on the ZX Spectrum name and LOAD from the command everyone knows. We shortened it later to LOAD ZX. And we're into our 6th year now, not including a year of so of preparation.

Because I was in partnership with City Hall, I solved a lot of issues. They would be able to provide the location, and staff to keep the museum open every day. They even insisted on free admission, although we do charge for guided tours. It was a perfect partnership - I provided the collection, they provided the space.

Getting there.

Don't feel so bad if you don't know where Cantanhede is. It's not a big place, but nicely positioned just a bit inland from the bridge of Portugal's nose.



It's a bit over an hour's drive south from Porto, or about 2:30 driving north from Lisbon. You can also get the train to Coimbra-B station and bus it from there. Or drive there on your C5 and die of exposure on the way.

Note that the town is in a wine-producing area, so BreakSpace recommends that you stay for a few nights and get absolutely sauced on local produce after visiting the museum. Just not *while* doing so.

I don't work there officially, but I am part-time with my former company and do spend most of my free time on the museum. It's addictive. Every day there are new opportunities. Last week I was at the Lisboa Games Week for the museum, and also I've been talking to museums in other countries about collaborations. We've made a documentary for national TV. We have made another series for them about the Spectrum, that will be out soon. We participated in the Rubber-Keyed Wonder by Gracious Film and I got to go to the premier in London at the BFI. The sky's the limit. I'm not really interested in space exploration, but if Elon Musk wants to send a computer to Mars, I want to make sure it's a Spectrum from the museum.

I love what we're trying to do. It's my legacy, really.

BS : You have turned your collection, your hobby, into a kind of career. That's what everyone wants.

JDR : But not a profession! I'm not getting paid by the museum, and that wasn't the motivation. I'm stuck with the problem of how to manage the situation. I have pressure from my wife because I'm not dedicating time to another company, and so on. It's complicated to manage. I had the collection and I wanted to say thank you to my parents, to Clive Sinclair, and to the Timex guys. I wanted to recognise that there was Portuguese engineering involved - and we don't have so many examples of that here, so we should document that and teach it in schools and so on. So I found a purpose for the collection: to teach people how important the Spectrum was. Not that it's the most important computer in history, or that everyone has to use a Spectrum now, but that it is important and should be documented. People are surprised when I tell them that we have hundreds of new games every year, even now.

BS : Yes, and we have to review them all. It's a lot! But you have achieved those goals and more.

JDR : Yes, and it's a little out of control. We have build this from the bottom up, without any grand 10-year business plan for expansion. But if there is any opportunities, we take them. I know people complain that we're not in a bigger city like Porto or Lisboa, or that we're not in the UK. But every opportunity that comes up, we take. And we had the chance to start here with support from the local government. They pay for one full-time person, and support staff to cover the reception and so on. I chose and employ the one full-time person that works directly for the museum, who runs the site and leads guided tours and so on. We have some sponsors, including Critical

Software, who are a major software company that works with Airbus and BMW and other partners. That's the company I started my career with. Then there is Redlight Software, and since last year SpecNext sponsored us as well. But most of the financing is from the city. The museum is a non-profit organisation with the purpose of communicating the story to the country. I'm the CEO of that organisation and I have loaned my collection to it. This organisation has then made the formal arrangements with the city to open the museum.

We have also teamed up with an old school friend of mine who is now a big YouTuber in Portugal, and we put on family-friendly gaming events in different cities with all the generations represented, from 8-bit through to modern arcade and PS5 games. This brings in some revenue that can be reinvested into the museum.

BS : Have you considered a second location, perhaps in the UK?

JDR : For sure. I've always dreamed about opening an exhibition in the UK, and I do have support from the Sinclair family. So it's not impossible.
We have worked on exhibits and purposely made them lightweight, in case we want to move them to the UK. Or just as easily Barcelona : Spectrum was huge in Spain as well. Even a second location in Portugal is possible. We have the knowledge and experience to open a second or even third location. We know the whole story, and we have the capacity. So, if the challenge appears, and the right partner appears, we are very open.

The museum's plans for world domination are laid out in detail here.

BS : The collection certainly seems large enough

JDR : I never claimed to have the biggest collection of Sinclair products in the world, but the Sinclair family and others have said several times that it is. I used to say that anyone in the UK could do what we have done - they just need a collection, and they could open a museum. But I have stopped saying that now. I've gotten close to the guys from Timex Portugal and gotten that part of the story. And for me it's impossible to tell the whole story without that. We have the first ZX Spectrum assembled in Portugal. We have the first TS-1000. We have lots of things from the factory, which makes the collection unique.
There may be collections out there that are as large, but I think that the way ours is organised makes it very suitable for an exhibition or museum.

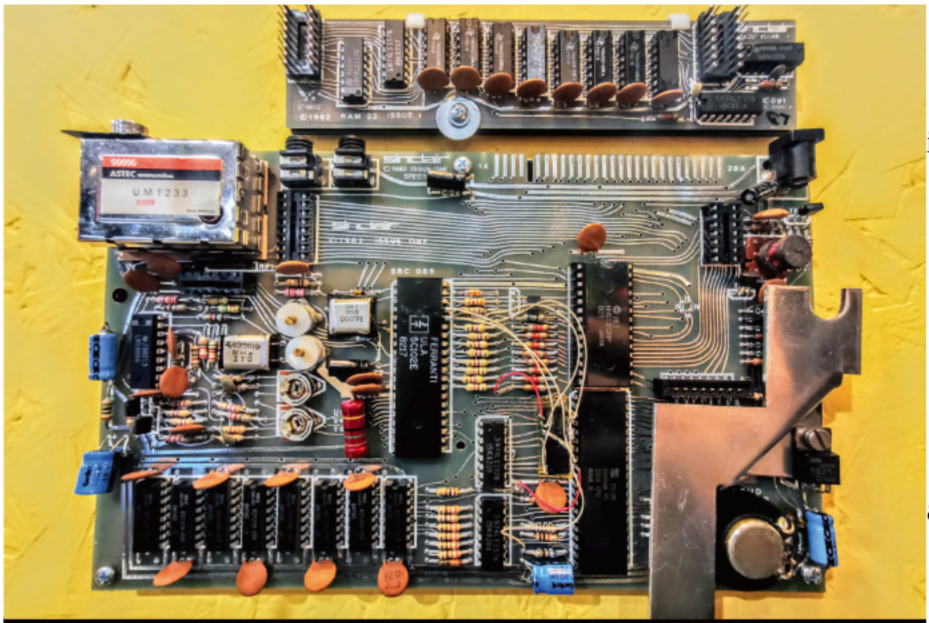
BS : What's the most special thing in the museum for you?

JDR : That's the most difficult question! Visitors sometimes ask this in the museum, and it depends so much on who you are. Did you grow up with a 48k? A Timex or Spectrum? Are you a collector? A programmer? Did you grow up in the UK or Portugal, or Spain? Then from there we can understand. But to me, the 48k rubber-key is the one I has a child, and you can't beat that. We have the 3rd oldest one that we still know the location of. The serial number is in the 800s, out of 6 million or whatever. But then we have an Issue 5 - there were only a thousand or so of those ever made, and we have one of those. If you're a collector, that's kind of the pinnacle. We have an NTSC version from the US. We have so many items, and so many stories.

We have 6 hours of interviews with a Timex employee from Brazil. He mentioned working on floppy drives for the Spectrum, and that they had adapted the hardware to run with other systems, including the Commodore 64. And we followed up on that, and we have some Commodore discs. Then he said 'We did something as well for Atari, I think'. And that's surely not possible - we would know if

There's the star of the show.

Timex had produced something for Atari. There are so many collectors and experts for that brand. So we asked him again, and he said it was for an orange computer. The Oric Atmos! This was a UK company called Tangerine, that developed the Oric 1 and Oric Atmos. This Atmos was very successful in France, and they had a supplier called Tran, who ordered a floppy drive system called Jasmin. So I bought one on E-bay after some long searching, and when it arrived it had a sticker on the bottom : Made in Timex Portugal. I almost cried when I saw it. You get a small tip, you track it down like Sherlock Holmes and eventually there it is. You can tell your countrymen, 'Hey, did you know that Timex also mode drives for another computer?' No-one knew, but now they know and it's in the museum.


Phwoar! An Issue 1 laid bare.

BS : Did you ever speak to anyone from Timex Scotland?

JDR : No, unfortunately.
I will go to Scotland in March as part of a videogame event in 2026, and will present at Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dundee. So of course I will spend some extra time in Dundee. But nothing exists anymore that we could find. We are working with a researcher, but we shall see if we can find anyone to talk to.

It's a long time ago. Part of it is that the Timex unit was setup as a research unit with just 5 people initially, and 3 of those were University leavers, very young. The Dundee unit was more established, so the people involved were older at that time, and sadly, many will have passed away by now.

We did interview the VP of Timex Computing in the US, who dealt with both sites. I had interviewed the head of Timex Portugal, and after he passed away I spent some time with his family to collect and organise a lot of files / mostly on Telex paper. So we have a lot of communications and schematics and so on, all scanned.

The Portugal and Scotland factories were in competition as parts of the US company. We do have communications from suppliers telling the Portugal unit that they needed to order more capacity, because the Scottish factory had ordered some so they were up to something. Lots of stories like that.

BS : Is there anything that you don’t have that you need?

I have a wishlist of 20 items here, but I don't think that there are any computers there. Some calculators. There's a BMW-branded calculator. There are some Sinclair audio pieces from the 1960s that we don't have. One major thing is the square satellite receiver for the Astra satellite that Cambridge released in the late 1980s. We have the receiver, the box that sits by the TV, but not the dish itself. I think I have to go to Cambridge and look at all the rooftops. I bet there is one up there.

Cable &
Satell
CAMBRIDGE
Do you have one of these* on your roof?
Then João would like a word.

*The satellite dish, not the boffin.

BS : What are your plans for 2026?

JDR : We are working on a project to recover Tenet, which was a network solution for Sinclair/Timex computers. The project lead at that time was David Carlin, who worked on the QL. Tenet was a way to network computers and printers etc., and to allow screen sharing and other things. It was intended for use in schools in China. It was Timex Portugal’s last major electronics project, but it never made it to commercial use. We gathered David and some of the engineers and showed them the recovered system working, which they never thought would be possible to see. We will finalise that project and exhibit in 2026.

I have the trip to Scotland coming up, and we are working on a project with another museum in Spain. And we have one other project that I shouldn't talk about with contacts in the UK. And that's just the research projects.

Then we have several outreach efforts and shows to expand our visibility outside the Sinclair enthusiast world. We have just been recognised by the Portugese Cultural Ministry, and we do hope to hold an exhibition at the Portugese parliament.

BS : How do the younger generations react to the museum?

JDR : What we do see is that if we have 6- or 8-year-old kids, then it's easier to engage them than the older kids. The younger kids don't seem to care so much about the graphics. Teenagers have more references, I think. Of course they will choose a PS5 over a Spectrum every time. One thing that is interesting is that we have an exhibit in the museum that breaks down how the old computers are basically similar to their phones and modern devices. They all have 4 parts - the CPU brain, an input system via screen or keyboard and output on the screen or audio, maybe a printer. But the 4th part is storage, which is difficult for the younger people. They don't ever see a disc drive, or a tape. Maybe a Blu-ray. Storage is abstract on their phone, so that's a little hard to explain.

But explaining the context to younger generations is very important to us. Once our generation passes away in the next 20 to 30 years, the only ones who will care about this era of computers will be museums. So if we only pitch the project at people who already care about the Spectrum, it will fail in the long term. So a large part of my responsibility is to reach outside that set. We do have a business plan now, and the last chapter of that is titled 'How to ensure the museum lasts for the next 50 years'. We have that responsibility, not just for our own legacy, but the legacy of everyone who worked at Sinclair and Timex over the years.

And what a legacy it is, with hardware from the full range of Sir Clive's storied career. The museum is a treasure trove for all Sinclair fans, well worth a visit.

And while you're saving up for the plane tickets, you can visit the museum via their Youtube account at https://www.youtube.com/@LOADZX

The museum even caters to fans of haunted paintings.

It's not just computers at the museum - it's got everything that Sir Clive laid his hand on over the decades, from 1960s hi-fi…

sinclair
Use and care of your Sinclair Flat-Screen Pocket TV.
LITHIUM POWER PACK
Polaroid

…to portable televisions from the 70s and 80s and even…

ZX Spectrum

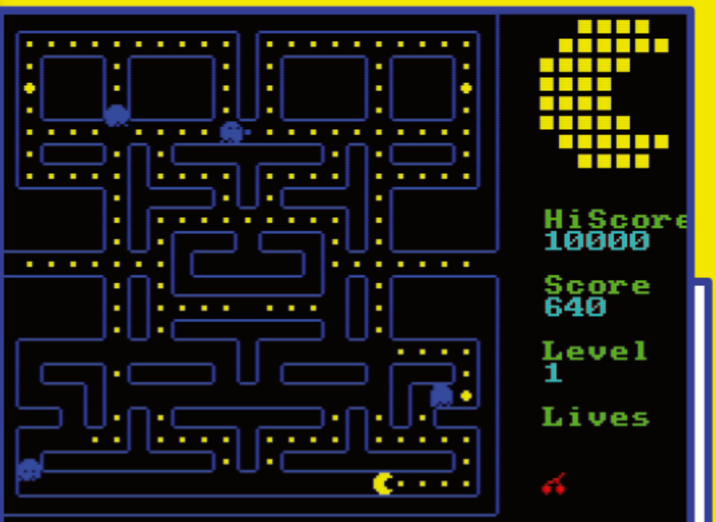
…a Zike! It's like Aladdin's cave.

O-Cman+ (or OC-Man+)

Oblo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44652

Free



There's no place like home

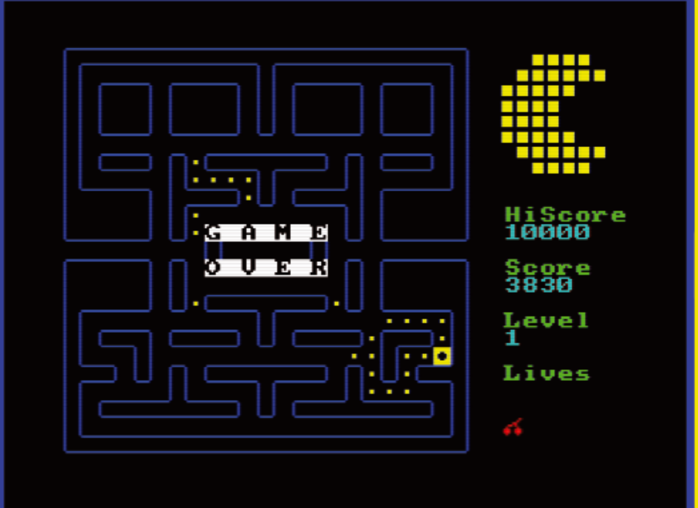
Whoah!!! Is that music..? it kind of hurts my brain a bit. Hmmm, it seems the title score has taken some influence from the ear piercing greeting that you'd have gotten from loading the infamous Horace Goes Skiing circa 1983, though in this case, the title music here is at least trying to be a bit more tuneful. Of course, I can always just turn the TV volume down. So, aside from this, what's going on here?

Pac-Man, the famous arcade game, has been ported and cloned as many or more times than any other arcade game, and while the quality of these might vary, one thing usually remains: guide an ever hungry animated Pizza base around a darkened maze, chomp on pills and avoid Ghosts (or similar), or get the super duper power pill which will allow you to consume the roaming spirits. When you do, said spirit will return to the (approximate) centre of the maze and regenerate. There's also bonus fruits to eat, starting with Cherries.

On starting the game, the let's say… interesting title music (?) goes away, and you get something more akin to the arcade sounds during play. Though a short jingle plays after every life lost and before play resumes, which although I've not played Pac-Man for a while (nor any variants) I don't remember on other clones.

The player sprite (the "O-Cman" in this case) and Ghosts are 8x8 character blocks. This allows managing the colour attributes nicely to avoid colour clash, and although it could cheat by moving one attribute block at a time, there are smooth pixel movements and animations, making it a better user experience. The controls respond pretty well. Good.

This game started out its journey in 2011, and presumably this update does what old iterations did, but better, and overall it does it pretty well. It's pretty tough from the get go, and I'm having to devise a new strategy to progress. As a child, I'd have been as happy with this, or happier even, than that Mastertronic knock off from the 1980s.



The wages of gluttony

Pac-Man is one of those semi secret hyphenates, like Spider-Man. It's a regular pedantry of mine, "you mean Pac-DASH-Man" which gains me no influence or superiority, merely glances of scorn. But I persist, because you know, grammar is crucial. To which people usually reply "what's my nan got to do with it?" So YOUR NAN aside, OC-MAN+ is similarly challenged, which we'll get to in a sec.

Of course this is the long awaited sequel to O-CMAN by the mononymous "oblo" from Spain. This new version is called O-CMAN+. There is a bit of a difference of opinion between the two games. The original's title screen proclaims OC-MAN in the grand old tradition, but everywhere else it seems to be O-CMAN. But hey, what's a hyphen between friends? As I've said… A LOT. I tentatively suggest the name should be OC-MAN+.

The game is a fairly straight clone of the Pac-Man we know and love, where our hero, a ball with a mouth (shudder) races around a nightmare maze pursued by the spirits of long dead maze occupants. Calling him a man is a stretch, but Pac-Severed-Head hasn't got quite the same ring to it. Never really thought of it as a horror game but the more I think about it the more ooky it becomes. He eats the pills until he gets to a big pill (strategically when cornered) at which time the drugs empower him to bust the ghosts by eating them. Yikes.

It's like a cross between the legend of the Minotaur meets the movie Phantasm.

So brushing my terror aside, it's a fairly routine retelling of the game of yore. It's fast and furious and the chase is very definitely ON once the boop-doop-boop-bop-biddly-biddly starting tune ends. It's a run for your life situation hampered by the necessity for picking up all the pills before you're done, which can be quite alarmingly hard at times.

Simple but challenging games like this don't come around very often so it's unsurprising people return to the format often. I'd like more of a spin on it if I'm honest and I'm not real sure what the upgrade to plus entails. It is an enjoyable version for sure, and well made and balanced. But I'm not sure the world needs another few clones of Pac-Man in the same way it doesn't need any more game reviewers who type things like boop-doop-boop-bop-biddly-biddly with a straight face.

If you like Pac-Man and you want one which looks a tiny bit different then you could do a lot worse than this. I love there are new games on our favourite computer, but on the whole I much prefer ones which are more original.

Blood of Dracula

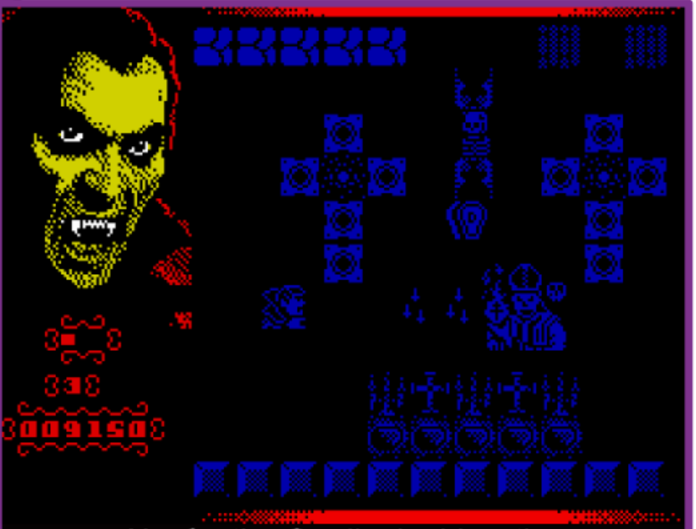
Furillo Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44710

PWYW / €2

I'm writing this on November the 1st, and while today the streets are littered with melting pumpkins and Parma Violet wrappers, last night it was glowing Jack-o'-lanterns and vampire repellent. Yes, it was Halloween—the perfect night for Furillo Productions to release Blood of Dracula.

On seeing the inlay (AI has done an annoyingly good job of a 1980s Hammer horror cover), I'd assumed this was a platform game, but to my surprise it's a shoot-em-up. As such, it's a landmark game for the Speccy - it's not the first horror shmup (that's Space Zombies 1983), nor the first scrolling one (Scary Things 2024), but it's the first horizontally scrolling one. Let that sink in.

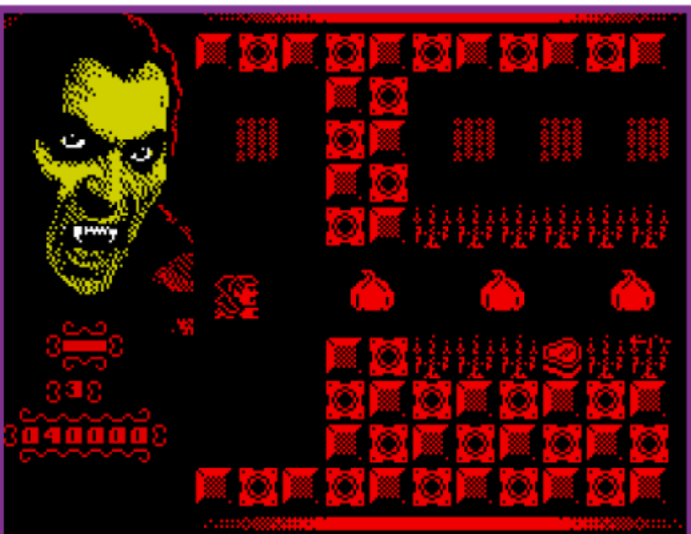


Aim for the Cardinal midsection

As with all Furillo games, a lot of effort goes into the game extras. It tells of how you, Count Dracula, escape your confinement and battle the custodians of the Crimson Order and ultimately Van Helsing himself, so that you can take your rightful place on the Throne. The flowery texts that describe the levels are well supported by the game itself. Monochrome graphics lend themselves particularly well to horror games—remember the eerie blood red of Codemasters' Ghost Hunters? So it's not INK 4, it's the verdant blanket of the High Forests of Carpathia. Though for some odd reason, the Crimson Monastery is blue.

Being authored with S.E.U.D, the baddies and bosses all follow set attack patterns. So you'll see plenty of sine wave formations, and I've seen legions of them over the years, but never ones made of garlic cloves! The key in designing such games is the choreography of attacks and scenery—it's easy to get wrong, leaving too many places to hide and not enough game to play. The main levels are well done and keep you on your toes, or at least always in enough doubt to avoid coasting. The bosses are a bit of a trudge. That's not to say they are easy, but it's a case of identifying a safe space to sit while the boss dances around you, then repeatedly ducking in & out to shoot. I'd say this is more of a weakness of the game designer than the game, and Blood of Dracula does attempt to make the best of it.

I never did anything for Halloween, so with the living room light off and skulking in the study, it was the perfect opportunity to play the bad guy in this quirky and solid shooter.



ONE garlic clove, a-ha-ha. TWO garlic cloves…

I'm writing this in a dark room full of cobwebs and creaky floorboards, bits of rotten pumpkin on the floor, my eyes bloodshot and face pale, a melancholy, wailing woman wandering from room to room, moaning incessantly. But this is early December and Halloween is long gone - just an average day at casa di Jon!

Ah, classic Hammer Horror films - you can't beat them. They take me right back to the early nineties, when Channel 4 used to show one every Friday night after the pubs had closed. I'd get dolled up, hit the bars, wondering which lucky lady was going to spend the evening with me. Then I'd stagger home (alone) and watch the weekly Hammer film (alone). Ah, those were the days.

Dave says this is the first horizontal horror shoot 'em up for the Speccy. I think he's forgotten about the old "classic" "Stop That There Alien" - which was horrific - albeit in all the wrong ways. Luckily, Blood of Dracula is a much better game and has lovely monochrome graphics which remind me of the early '90s speccy games, particularly Ocean's The Addams Family - the single hardest, most unforgiving game on God's green earth.

The game has a gorgeous rendition of Christopher Lee on the playing screen, and the visuals are packed with instantly identifiable Hammer tropes: crucifixes, rampaging villagers, and Dracula's brides (speaking of which - shouldn't they be on Dracula's side?).

The 5 levels aren't too difficult once you become familiar with the attack patterns. I did find the collision detection a bit iffy, though - more than once my well-placed bullets didn't seem to do the damage they should have done, but maybe I'm just not as good a shot as I think I am. It's never going to replace R-Type, but it's a jolly decent shoot 'em up that should definitely appeal to Hammer Horror fans (like myself).

I hope to see Peter Cushing's likeness in the author's next game - maybe a top-down scrolling shoot 'em up with Frankenstein hurling body parts at hordes of angry villagers? Or - even better - a game where you play as Bernard Cribbins from "She". I'd play that!

Willy in the Islands of Mystery. Part II: The Temple

Hervé Ast

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45181

Free

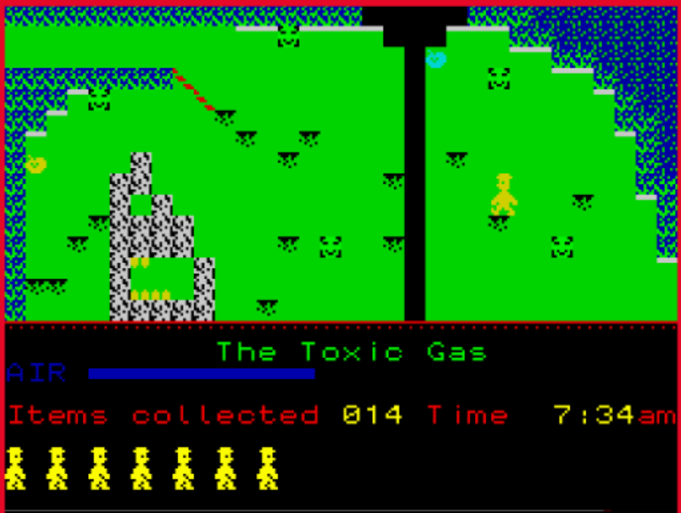
Jet Set Willy is an obscure platforming game on the ZX Spectrum that was released in 1984, you've probably never heard of it.

Having read Dave's "Thoroughly Modern Willy" article in Break Space issue 2, I've been interested in trying out some of these crazy JSW mods. (If you've not read the article, I can recommend it, it's an excellent read). The problem is that SO many Speccy games were released in the latter half of 2025 and our mission is to review as many of them as is humanly possible, it's been difficult to get the time to have a proper go at them.

So, when a Willy mod was released on 31 December and someone was needed to cover it against a tight deadline, I was secretly delighted that my name was pulled from Mpk's (presumably top) hat.

Willy in the Islands of Mystery: Part II: The Temple (WITIOM:PT:TT) is a sequel to "Part I: Exploration" that was released in 2007. In the previous game, Willy was stranded on a mysterious island and had to explore the strange landscape. In this sequel he finds himself at the entrance to the ancient temple that he found at the end of his previous adventure.

So begins your quest. I'm sure most readers will be familiar with the mechanics of a Willy game, so as you would expect there are an abundance of tight, unforgiving, pixel perfect jumps.

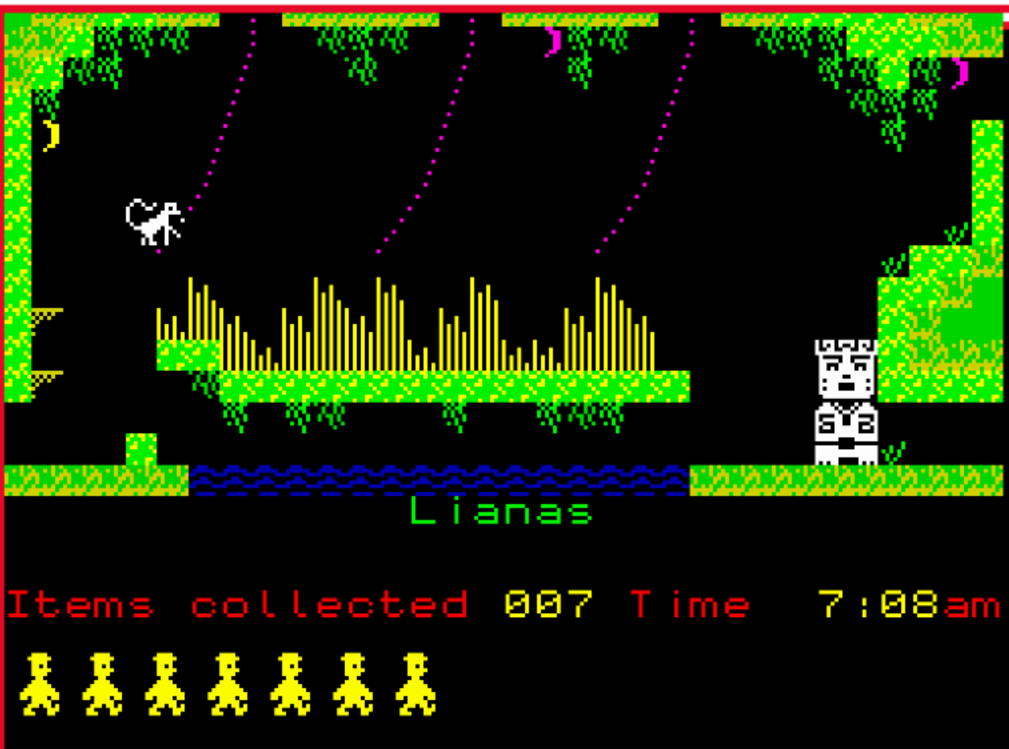


This looks perfectly safe

The rooms are varied and interesting, progress for me was slow but the more I saw, the more I wanted to see. There is so much colour and creativity on display here, every room is bursting with imagination. There are rooms with colossal crushers, seemingly impassable objects, disappearing & reappearing nasties, aliens, pop culture references and even screens where you turn into a monkey!

The game is as punishing as you would expect it to be, the rope swings are as chaotic for me as they were in 1984. Having said that, it's not quite to the level of some of the sadistic Willy mods out there, at least with a bit of practice and exploration you should get to experience and appreciate the levels that Herve Ast has designed.

So, if it's been a while since you've got yourself lost in a Miner Willy adventure, I can thoroughly recommend the WITIOM games. On top of that I've got through that without a single Willy joke.* Maybe I'll stick to my new year's resolution to be more mature after all.



Cheeky Monkey

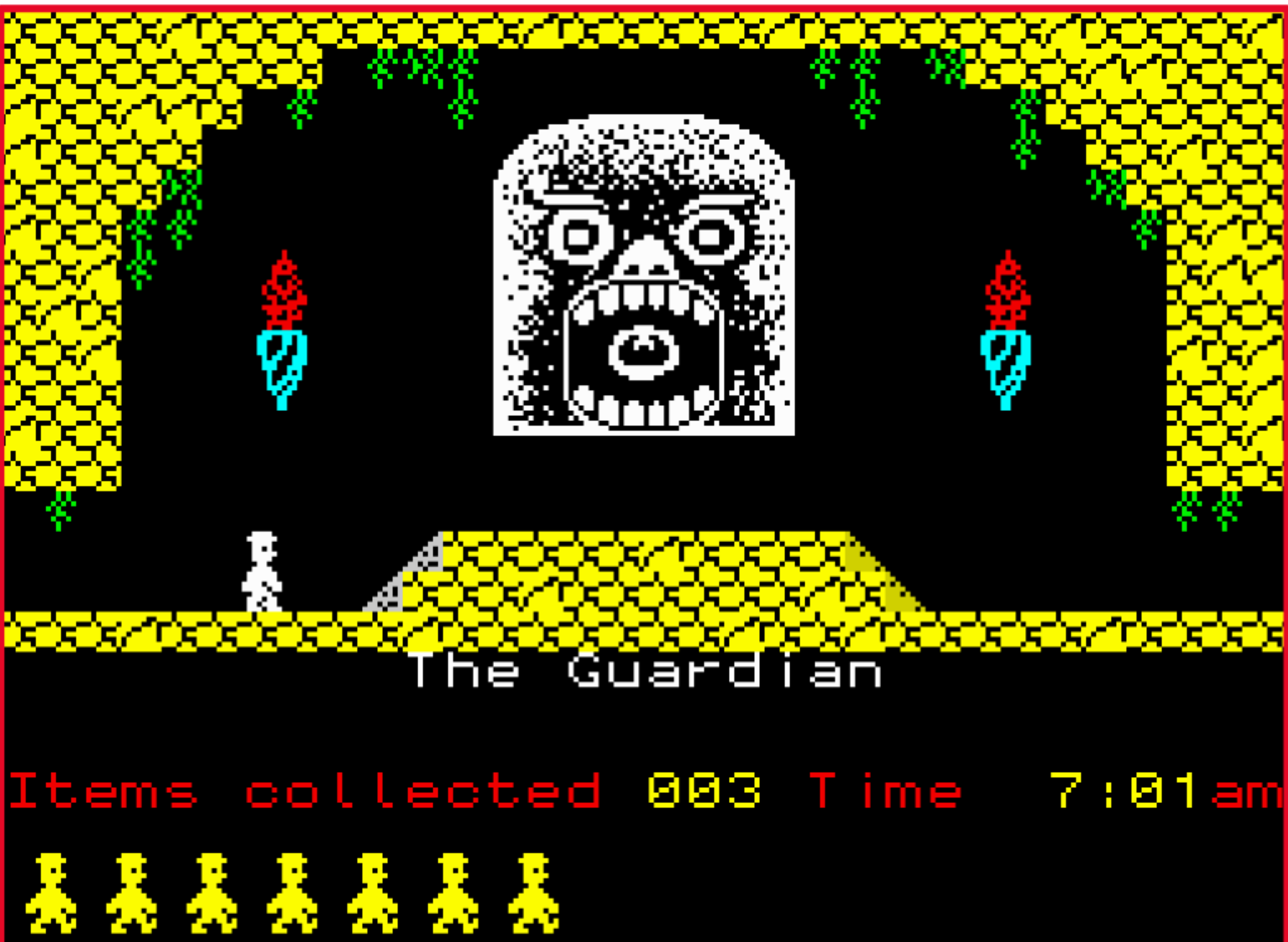
---

*Not even a little one

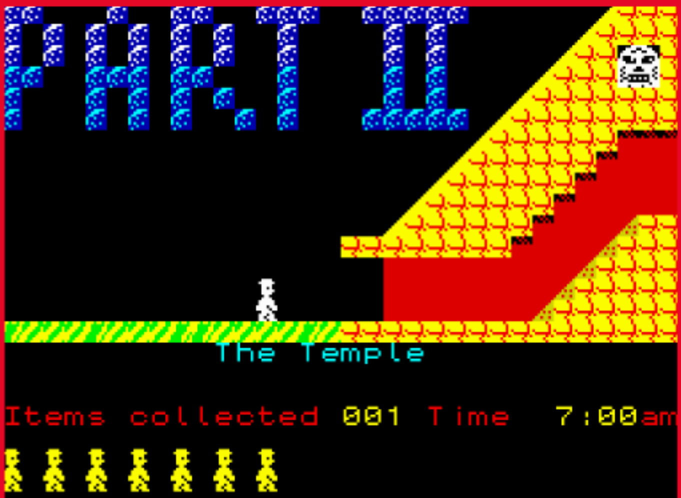
Nineteen years is a long time to wait for a sequel. If films are anything to go by, three to five years is the norm, and even the masterpiece that was Bridget Jones's Baby* came a mere twelve years after The Edge of Reason. Nevertheless, true to his word that Part 1 was indeed part one, Part 2 picks up where the other left off. From the same screen to be precise: Willy has found an arcane Temple on the Island of Mystery.

It makes use of the extra features of the JSW64 engine, so we see extra sprites, extra tunes and on some screens the use of Manic Miner's air supply and solar power beam. So you can play with one eye on the gameplay and the other on whichever tricks are being employed to make it happen. Though it's best to assume that there's something clever happening on most screens, and that only elite JSW modders will be able to elucidate what it is.

This is another game for hardcore players, so get POKE 35899,0 at the ready. The Temple is an eclectic mix of Aztec, Alien, Industrial and just plain BIZARRE influences, with the common theme of being hard as nails. The huge Guardian stone near the start sums it up nicely. You need to walk slowly and carefully under this descending lethal obstacle, with pixel perfection and more decorum than Indiana Jones—because Willy keeps his hat on.



I don't want to meet The Express



Subtle

---

*Splutter, cough etc. - Ed

Puzzle Invaders

ZXKerl

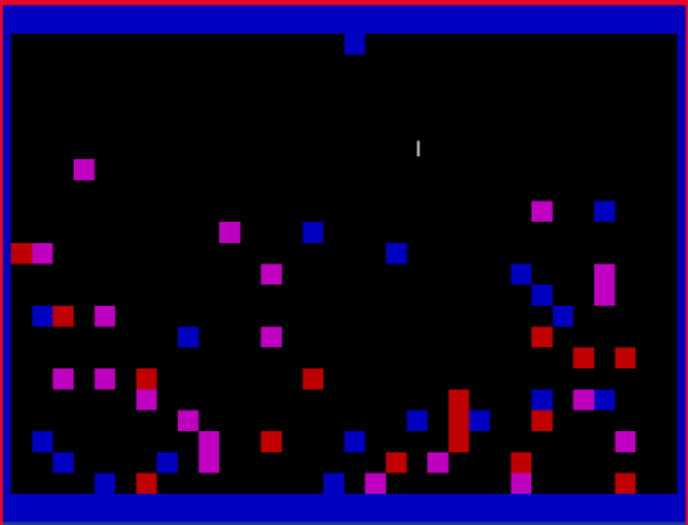
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44667

Free

When I do these reviews, I play the games in the knowledge that they've not been created by big cynical corporations, churning out soulless product to try to get rich by relieving kids of their pocket money. No, they are generally made by an individual or a group of individuals with the same love of old computers that we all have, and as such, I try to make sure to give each game a fair crack and look for the good in them.

Upon loading up Puzzle Invaders, a game written in BASIC, I had this in the forefront of my mind. On my first go, the screen slowly filled up with various coloured blocks that I seemed to be able to do little or nothing about in spite of shooting them, until it said "Game Over". After a second go, the same thing happened, again, like King Cnut I was powerless to stop the rising tide of blocks. All this made me panic, uh-oh I thought, what on Earth can I say about this?

Before I played a third time, I thought I should give the brief instructions a proper read and all of a sudden I realised what a stupid Cnut I'd been, I was playing this completely wrong! You're not supposed to randomly shoot the blocks, you must shoot them in a specific order (red, magenta, blue) to unleash the cyan "super shot". Rather than move your character left & right, it's 1 button to change direction and you move your bullet "aftertouch" style.



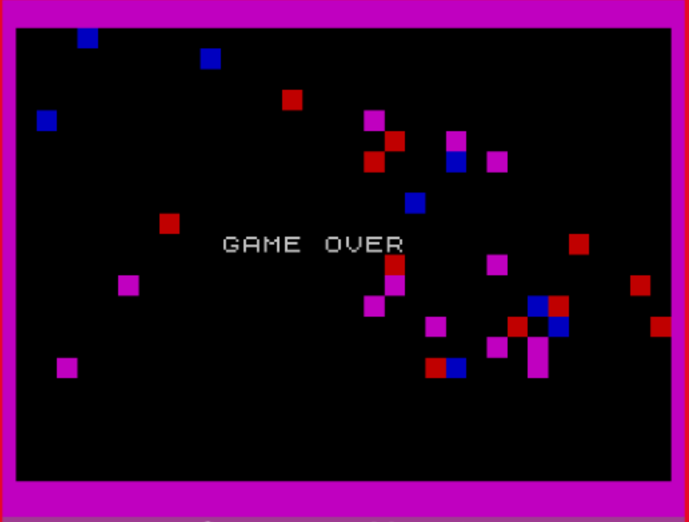
Blue death from above

On my third go I still didn't do great, but at least I knew what I was supposed to do and the more I played the better I got. It turns out this is a great little high score chaser and a lot of fun to boot. There are 2 modes, finite & infinite, and both versions play similarly, with the difference being the obvious end point (or lack thereof). The game combines shooter elements with colour matching games, both of which I'm a big fan of and I found the frantic nature of the game and the pull of beating my previous high score rather addictive.

The lesson here is clearly: If you can't see the beauty in something; don't dismiss it, look harder…oh and read the fricking instructions!!

I assume it's a spaceship you're in control of in this game. If it is, its weaponry is in serious need of an upgrade. The thin, slow line you fire off in attack is a bit feeble, if you ask me. Certainly not sufficient to enter into an intergalactic war against hordes upon hordes of evil, coloured blocks!

Sloany says he struggled with the game at first because he didn't read the instructions properly and ended up playing it the wrong way. I don't have that excuse – I went in after (sensibly!) reading the instructions on the opening screen, and I was also armed with Sloany's review, which brilliantly describes the mechanics of the game more elegantly than I ever could. No, I struggled with this game because I am really, really crap at it. Really crap. As colourful and lovely as the blocks are, there are just too many of them! And they keep on coming! That said, this isn't a bad game…



GAME OVER

Game over, Man etc.

I once went ten-pin bowling with an old girlfriend of mine, who wasn't enjoying herself because she discovered she wasn't very good at it. It didn't help that she was playing against me (I hate blowing my own trumpet, and I hate exaggerating even more – but I'm the best in the world at bowling). I sat her down and suggested that fun can still be had even if you're not very good at something. Every turn, just try to beat your previous score. Every time you do, consider it a little victory. I've no idea whether my lecture improved her bowling - she accused me of something called "mansplaining" and I never saw her again - but I stand by my sage advice on how to have fun with a difficult game.

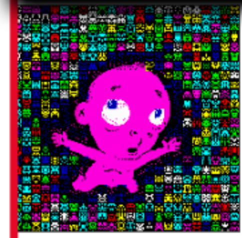
And so it was with this mindset that I played the game. I knew I was crap; I just wanted to become a little less crap with every go. And after a whole afternoon playing this in an airport (waiting for a plane – in case you're interested), my score finally passed the 100-point mark. Little victories indeed!

Sinclair Tower

Rubenretro

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44643

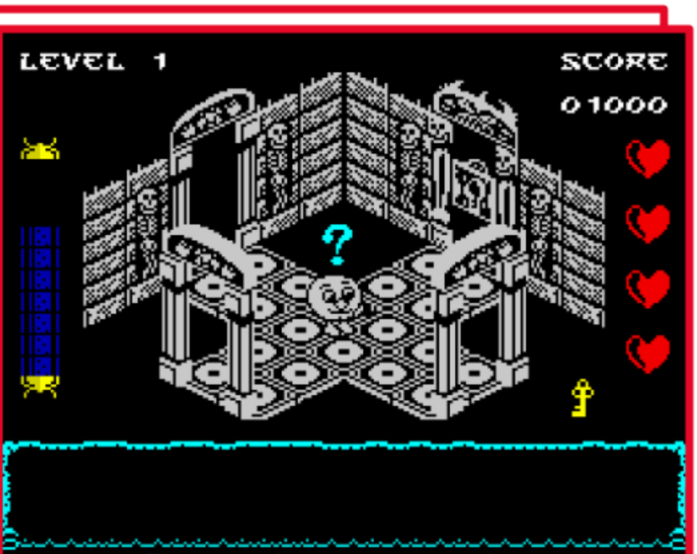
Free



People often think I'd be a good addition to a pub quiz team. Presumably the spectacles and awkward manner suggest my time is spent closeted away in the library reference section. Unfortunately this is not the case, yet I keep turning up every Thursday, in the vain hope of being instrumental in team *Skilly Bragg* winning the Amazon vouchers. If I wasn't the designated driver I'd probably be out on my ear by now. If only there were more questions on the ZX-Spectrum…

That's where Sinclair Tower plays to the crowd, as a Speccy quiz wrapped up in an isometric maze adventure. Through the 5 levels of the tower, you need to first find the key and then the exit. In every new room you open a chest, which may contain the key, a health boost, a time boost, a booby trap, or a multiple choice question from a Sinclair-obsessed goblin.*(You called? - Ed)* Most of the chests contain the latter, which is no punishment at all, for the questions are very well curated. It's mostly game trivia, and a few merciful technical questions. If the goblin really wanted to make us suffer, it could have cherry-picked from an endless supply of impenetrable hardware threads on the SC forum. What causes the IC33 (MC1488N) to run hot? I have no idea. In fact I have no idea what I just *typed*.

The maze part of the game is more than a mere vehicle for the quiz—it's integral and fun to play. And it's a proper isometric engine, simpler than the likes of Knight Lore, but it still renders background, sprite and foreground in order. A bit of flicker suggests that the Boriel BASIC is straining a bit in the process, but it's still impressive.

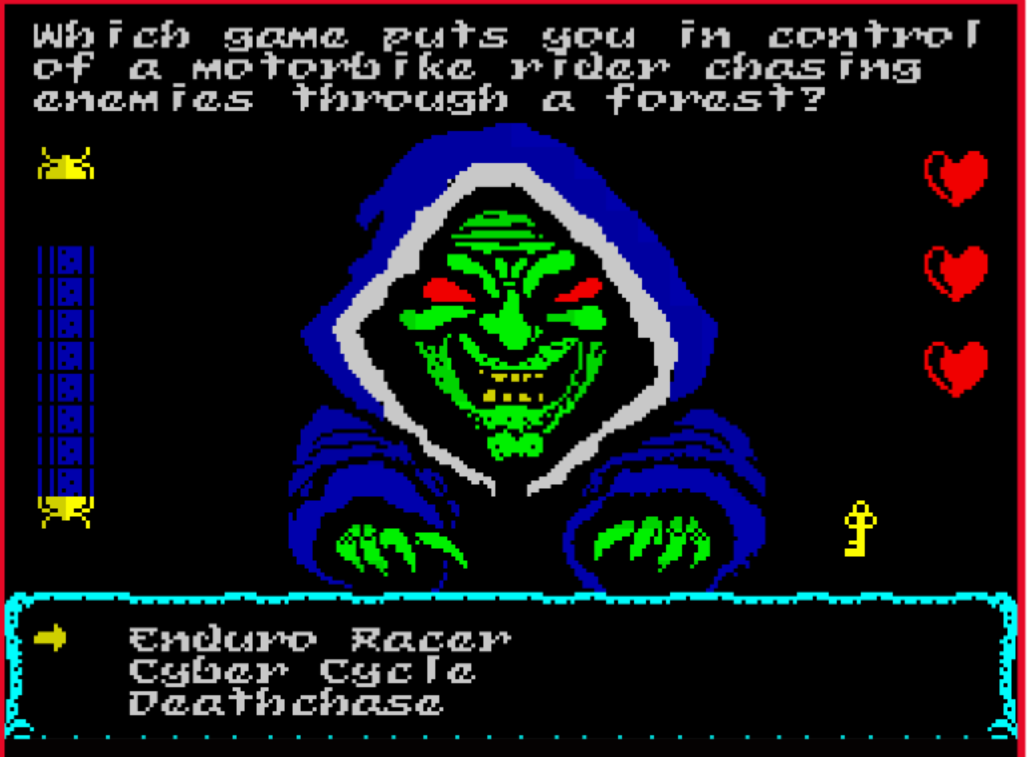


Fewer exits, more questions

There are difficulty levels, going from 'easy peasy' to 'no mercy'. The difference being time limits and likelihood of deadly traps. The questions are the same regardless, so I didn't see any reason to play on hard—we're here for the speccytriv, not dying on the toss of a coin. Having said that, the 'no mercy' setting flies in the face of retrogame tradition and is actually quite fair.

This is a smallish game, so you'll notice the questions start to repeat after a few plays. It's easy enough complete in that time though, so perhaps perfectly pitched for the average player, and it's no crime leaving the audience wanting more. So while we wait for the special editions (modern era, text adventures, shootemups and Beeby boomer anyone?), you can walk that little bit taller for knowing that Firebird published Elite.

There are 2 trivia games in this issue, the other being Dr Jim's ZXMas Quiz, with 2 very different presentations. Both scratch the simple itch of asking questions, with the comfortable multiple choice format. Even if you guess, you've a decent chance. It's all cheerfully low stakes.



Which game puts you in control of a motorbike rider chasing enemies through a forest?

Enduro Racer
Cyber Cycle
Deathchase

It's definitely not Stonkers

The mazey 3D map here looks nice, and in a way, developing such a fancy, good looking engine for a trivia is seems like overkill for a trivia game, but it's a welcome enthusiasm. The maze adds to the challenge. It's all very well knowing all about who developed R-Type or what the plot of Midnight Resistance is, but if you can't find the key to the next level you're still going to run out of time.

In a way, developing such a fancy, good looking engine for a trivia is seems like overkill for a trivia game, but it's a welcome enthusiasm.

The goblin here (no relation, Dave, thanks very much) is a charmingly nefarious fellow, and it's nice to see a guy with a hobby he loves. Hanging out in a dungeon ambushing travelers with questions isn't everyone's idea of a good time, but he's put the effort in and does a great job of it, with the daintily-presented packages and all. He should publish a magazine on the internet about it.

A fun distraction, that makes a nice change from more high-octane action games.

Puppies Rescue

Daniel Isoba

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44628

PWYW / $2

This is my first review for issue 4, fresh from the proofing of issue 3, and on the morning of its release. So, as I write, Hallowe’en 2025 hasn’t happened yet, and I’ve clearly not even thought about any Christmas shopping or anything like that (that happens on Christmas Eve anyway). I’ve also just had an Hawaiian Pizza for lunch, if you are interested. Pineapple on Pizza is 100% legitimate in my view. Right, what am I supposed to be waffling on about? Oh yes. Puppies Rescue. It’s a bright, colourful and well presented 2D scrolly-type shoot ‘em up with some boppy and sometimes sickly sweet but oddly dramatic AY music.

The future of our domesticated familiars is bleak, as a sinister black market opens up some time around 2300AD. Savage attacks on pet transportational vehicles have left hundreds of helpless puppies stranded in some of the most dangerous areas on our planet. This dystopian future needs a hero, someone of valour, honour and bravery. You know your calling.

As I noted in the rather fun “Hit the Fan” (BS issue 3, page 37), I’m not so keen on the Flappy Bird style keep-pushing-up-to-maintain-your-vertical-position game mechanic, but fortunately, the levels in Puppies Rescue are a little cleaner and it’s not such a distraction. Though, whilst you travel in an shielded and armoured vessel, those shields only protect against certain objects within the game. Hitting anything can dissipate it by at least one unit. Turning isn’t instantaneous, like on many other games. Your craft takes a short time to rotate from moving left to right or vice versa. There is some learning curve to get used to, and I find I’m not always able to turn quickly enough if some malevolent creature is trying to sneak up on me.

On rescuing a puppy, you are given a station to go to, but of course, these aren’t in a linear order, and you must search for the right place to safely deposit your rescued four legged familiar, which in itself may be quite a challenge. Mostly though you are able to dodge the nasties out to get you, as your fire power is somewhat underwhelming, and the upgrades too are limited in number.

For your download, you are given three game variants. I recommend starting on the one named PuppiesKelben128.tap as an introduction to the mechanics, and being set under water, with PuppiesTheGame128k.tap starting off as a platformer for its first level (yes, that’s right: up to jump). PuppiesHard128.tap is just that: more of the same, but more difficult, and for me is almost always instant death each time (though I’m getting a few more pixels into it after each try).

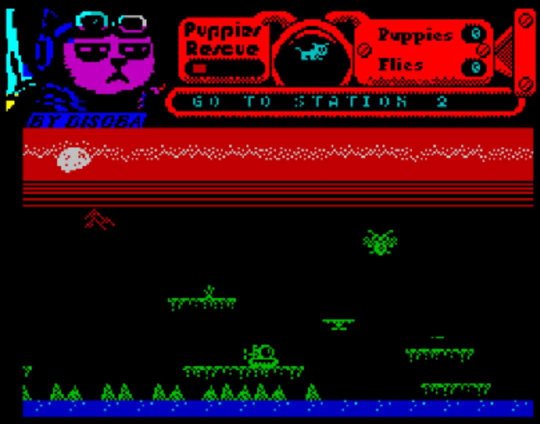
Overall, I think this is pretty good and wins for graphics, presentation and music; gameplay wise it takes a little getting used to, but once you do, you’ll be rescuing those poor puppies like the hero you are.

For ZX Spectrum fans seeking something different, Puppies Rescue offers notable ambition. This is essentially three games in one package: a horizontal shoot 'em up, a scrolling platformer, and a daunting hard mode. While this provides great variety, the experience is hampered by fiercely challenging and often unforgiving mechanics.

Both main games share a critical, and frustrating, control feature: your character moves horizontally at a constant, unstoppable pace.

In the platformer, this makes precision jumping incredibly difficult. You are forced to commit to leaps with little room for error, a challenge worsened by the fact most platforms are instant death traps. In the shoot 'em up, your ship suffers from heavy inertia. Changing direction causes a lethal drift into enemies or obstacles, feeling unpredictable and cheap.

The game, built with the MPAGD engine, feels pushed to its limits. The fake scrolling can be dizzying and the sprite movement often lacks the refinement needed for such a difficult game.



This puppy insists on being rescued to Station 2. Fussy sod.

Yet, for all its frustrations, Puppies Rescue has charm. The loading screen uses a clashing colour palette that is pure brilliance, and the music tracks, including a 007 theme, are excellent. The core mechanic is also engaging: you must locate and carry lost puppies to specific safe spots, adding a novel puzzle element.

The title itself, reportedly from a Spanish author, sounds slightly odd in English, but it suits the game's quirky nature.

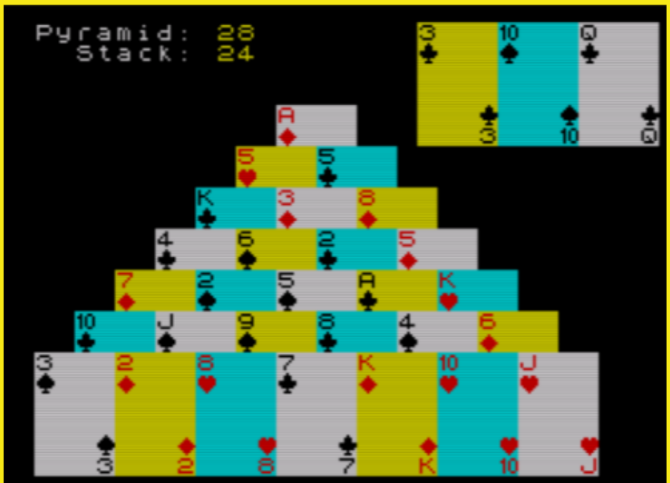
Final Verdict: Puppies Rescue is a game of sharp contrasts. It is an ambitious package with genuine charm and novel ideas, but it is let down by brutal, unrefined controls. It is a curio that is well worth a look, but it may quickly deter the faint of heart.

Pyramid Solitaire

Wyesoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44663

Free



How you begin. That King can go, for starters.

Well, butter my biscuits! I haven't played Pyramid Solitaire since I was a nipper! I used to play it with my mum on the lounge floor, usually with Murder, She Wrote on in the background. Happy memories!

Having been so long, I had to remind myself how to play (thank you, YouTube — although instructions are provided with the game), and like Michael Bublé, I soon got back into the swing of things.

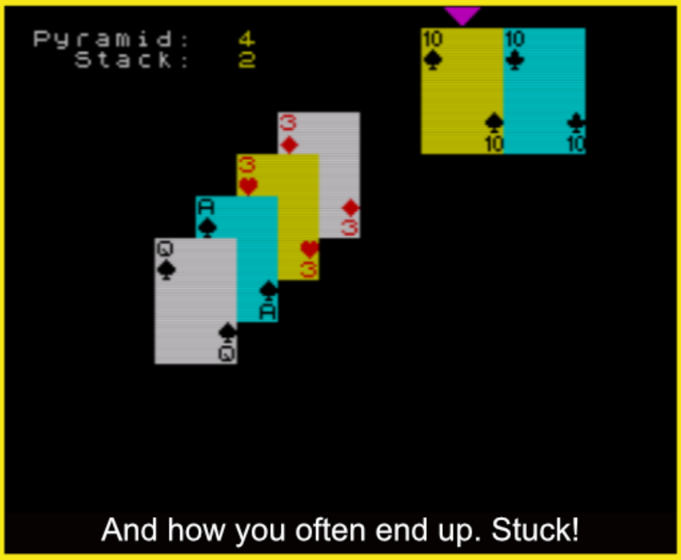
Pyramid Solitaire is a game in which 28 playing cards are placed face-up in a pyramid formation. The rest of the pack becomes your stock pile. The aim of the game is to slowly dismantle the pyramid from the ground up. You do this by removing pairs that add up to 13. Aces count as 1, jacks as 11, queens as 12, and kings as 13 (the king card doesn't need a pair to be removed) - all other cards hold their face value. Only completely visible cards can be removed, so if one card is slightly covered by another - well, tough tomatoes! But don't panic - you can also combine cards from the top of your stock pile (or even your waste pile) to help you when needed.

You move the cursor and select cards using either a joystick or the keyboard. SPACE selects a card, and ENTER shuffles the stock pile. You win the game by removing all the cards from the pyramid. The graphics are bright and clear, and the game runs as smooth as...a very smooth thing! There's no audio to speak of, except for a little beep when you find a correct pair — but do we really need anything else?

What this incarnation of the game brings to the table is that it completely removes the need to engage in any maths. Simply click on a card and it will tell you which match you're looking for. Well - I can't decide if that's a good or bad thing. At first I thought, "No maths? Brilliant!" — but on quiet reflection, maybe my brain is missing out on the workout it so sorely needs. Maybe an option to turn that feature on or off would keep everyone happy!

I tried to find an instance of any version of Pyramid Solitaire ever being released on the Spectrum in the past, and drew a blank. I find that oversight extraordinary — so hats off to Wyesoft for finally filling a glaring gap in the market! Playing this has not only brought back some happy memories but also made me rediscover what an underrated card game this is.

Now, all together now - "While life goes on around him everywhere... He's playing Solitaire!"



And how you often end up. Stuck!

There is an old saw which states "anything done alone is a vice". So drinking, sex, punditry, flattery and complaints all become vices when solitary. So yes, video games in general but solitaire games in particular qualify as a vice. Remember when you are filling in a form for your next job or housing application to be very clear about your favourite vices. Or bring it up randomly during afternoon tea with the vicar, that always goes down well. As does the vicar. (Fnar.) There is another old saw I love to bring out, but I keep that in a draw away from prying eyes, and we'll get to that in a minute.

Pyramid Solitaire is that rare beast, a game format I was previously unaware of. *(Come off it Snouty, you didn't recognise a Columns clone the other month - Ed.)* Well that was a popular console game and I was Squadron Leader of the Campaign for ZX Purity at the time, so go piddle up a rope. But yes, broadly speaking I have the attention span of a gnat, so I miss a lot of things.

In any case my second favourite thing to do alone is IRL solitaire card games with actual cards, so I'm surprised I've never encountered this variant before. The setup is easy: cards are placed in a pyramid shape (well duh) and the stock pile is at the top. You match cards to make up 13 to eliminate them from the pyramid and only cards which are fully exposed (snort, snigger) can be played. Kings can be eliminated by selection as they are already 13, I guess.

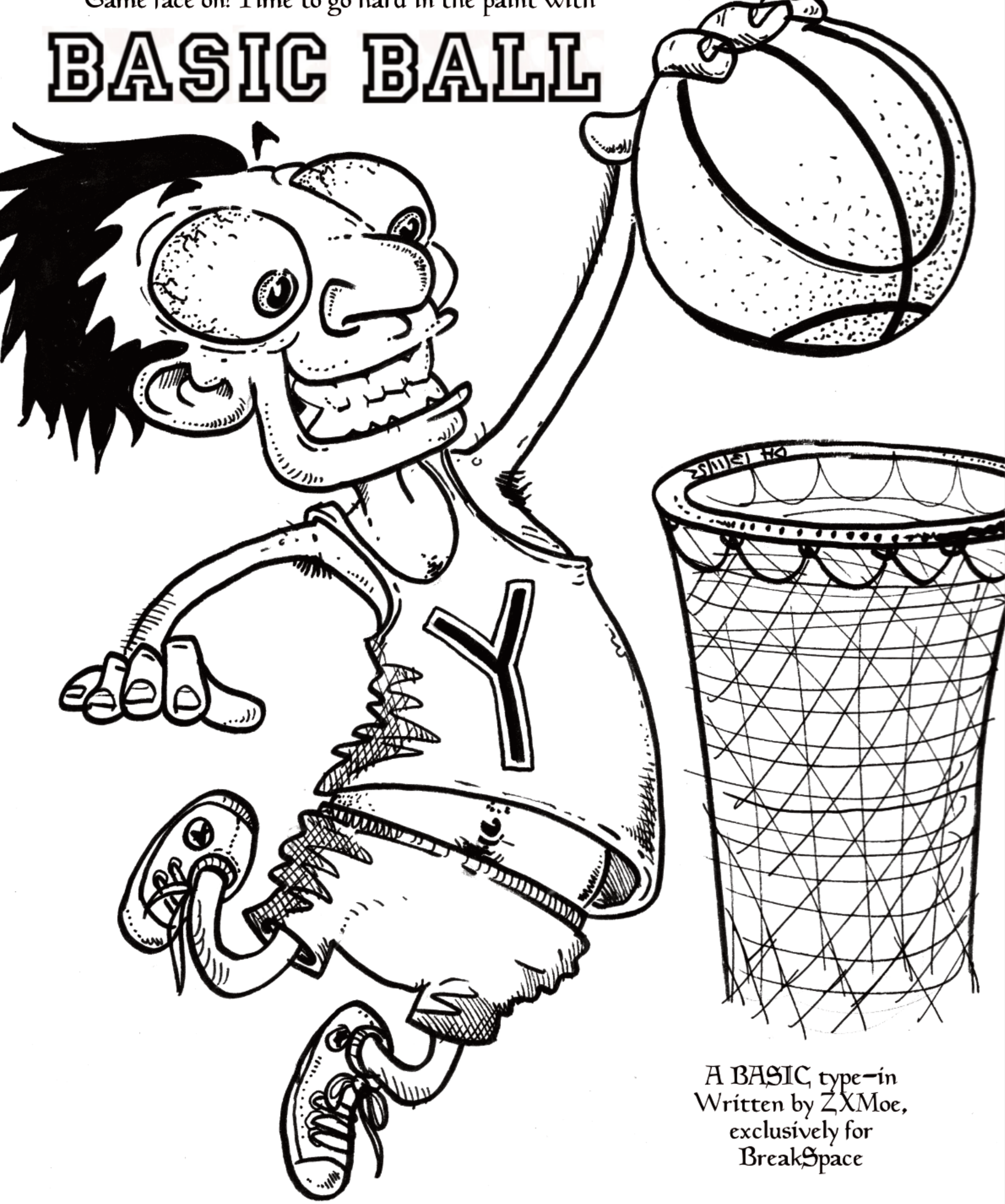
I'm a big fan of elementally basic but devilishly difficult games, and this falls into that category. The mechanics are simple, pair up the cards, but the stumbling block is a randomiser, the order the cards are laid in. There is a point at which you, like I just did, need the only 7 left in the pack, but it's at the top of the pyramid and the only card you can use to pair it with, the 6, is blocking the deck four layers down. You get stuck, it's inevitable. Which makes it all the more delicious when you succeed in clearing the board.

Because solitaire games are by necessity randomly set up, the odds of dealing yourself a layout which is impossible for you to solve is quite high. This however is why they are so darned addictive.

Oh and in case you were wondering, my first favourite thing to do alone is reverse taxidermy. Not brought any dead animals back to life successfully yet, but I think it's just a case of more wattage.

Game face on! Time to go hard in the paint with

BASIC BALL



A BASIC type-in
Written by ZXMoe,
exclusively for
BreakSpace

```
10 GO TO 550: REM Physics engine

20 IF e<0 THEN GO TO 430

30 LET b=b+.05: LET c=x: LET d=y: LET
x=x+a: LET y=y+b

40 IF y<0 THEN LET y=0

50 IF y>21 THEN LET y=21

70 GO TO 80+ATTR (y,x)

80 REM Ball Interactions

82 PRINT AT y,x;"0";AT d,c;"0";: CONTINUE

83 LET a=a*.6: LET f=f+(f=1)-NOT f: GO TO
82

85 BEEP .002,35: LET x=c: LET y=d: LET b=-
b*.5: LET a=-a*.5: LET e=e-1: CONTINUE

86 LET f=f+NOT f: GO TO 82

87 BEEP .02,-20: LET x=c: LET y=d: LET b=-
b*.25: LET a=-a*.25: LET e=e-4: CONTINUE

88 BEEP .002,20: LET x=c: LET y=d: LET b=-
b*.7: LET e=e-1: CONTINUE

89 BEEP .002,20: LET x=c: LET y=d: LET a=-
a*.7: LET e=e-1: CONTINUE

335 BEEP 1,1: CONTINUE

340 REM Ball throwing section.

350 LET nt=nt+1: LET t=45: LET u=1: PRINT
#1;AT 0,0;"ANGLE:";: LET c=px+1: LET d=py:
LET x=c: LET y=d: INK 8: OVER 0

360 LET c=x: LET d=y: LET x=px+2.9*COS (-
t*0.01745): LET y=py+2.9*SIN (-t*0.01745):
LET u=u*1.2: PRINT AT d,c;" ";AT y,x;"0";
#1;AT 0,6;INT t;"  ";

370 IF INKEY$="o" THEN LET t=t+(u AND
t<180): GO TO 360

380 IF INKEY$="p" THEN LET t=t-(u AND t>-
15): GO TO 360

390 IF INKEY$<>" " THEN LET u=1: GO TO 370

400 PRINT #1;AT 1,0;"POW:";: GO SUB 480

410 LET u=256-PEEK 23558: LET u=u/84 OR
u>84: PRINT #1; PAPER 2+INT (3*(1-u));TAB
4+u*28;: IF INKEY$<>"" THEN GO TO 410

420 GO SUB 470: LET a=u*2*COS (-t*0.01745):
LET b=u*2*SIN (-t*0.01745): LET c=x: LET
d=y: OVER 1: CONTINUE

430 REM Ball stops

440 IF f=2 THEN GO SUB 490: FOR x=1 TO 50:
BEEP .005,RND*40: NEXT x: LET ns=ns+1: GO
TO 580
```

```
450 GO TO 580

460 INK 2: PAPER 0: BORDER 0: CLS : PAPER
1: PRINT AT 0,0; INK 0,,: FOR y=0 TO 20:
PRINT INK 1;AT y,31;" ";: NEXT y: PRINT
INK 0,,;: PAPER 0: INK 2: RETURN

470 PRINT OVER 0; INK 2;AT py,px-1;"   ";
INK 7;AT py,px;"Q";AT py+1,px-1;"/";
INVERSE 1;"Y"; INVERSE 0;"\";AT py+2,px-
1;"( )";: RETURN

480 PRINT INK 7; OVER 0;AT py,px-1;"(Q/";AT
py+1,px-1;" "; INVERSE 1;"Y"; INVERSE 0;"
";AT py+2,px-1;"( )";: RETURN

490 PRINT INK 7; OVER 0;AT py,px-1;"\Q/";AT
py+1,px-1;" "; INVERSE 1;"Y"; INVERSE 0;"
";AT py+2,px-1;"( \";: RETURN

500 LET yb=5+INT (12*RND): PRINT INK 6;AT
yb-2,25;"      ";AT yb-1,25;"      "; INK
5;AT yb,25;"O    O-"; INK 3;AT yb,26;"===";
AT yb+1,25;" ### ";AT yb+2,25;" ### ";:
RETURN

510 REM Main menu

520 BORDER 0: PAPER 0: INK 7: CLS

530 PRINT INK 6; BRIGHT 1;AT 3,7;"***
BASIC-BALL ***"; INK 2;AT 5,7;"free throw
session"; INK 5;AT 10,10;"- CONTROLS -";
BRIGHT 0;AT 12,7;"  O,P : DIRECTION";AT
13,7;"SPACE : THROW";AT 14,6;"HOLD SPACE
FOR POWER";AT 18,5; FLASH 1;"PRESS ANY KEY
TO START";#1;AT 0,13;"V. 1.0";AT 1,9;"\*
ZXMOE (2025)";

540 PAUSE 1: PAUSE 0: GO TO 570

550 REM On RUN

560 POKE 23662,20: POKE 23663,0: POKE
23664,0: POKE 23561,255: GO SUB 600: GO TO
510

570 LET ns=0: LET nt=0:

580 REM Start new throw

590 GO SUB 460: PRINT INK 2;AT
1,1;"THROWS:";nt;AT 2,1;"POINTS:";ns;: LET
e=12: LET f=0: RANDOMIZE : LET px=5+INT
(18*RND): LET py=18: GO SUB 470: GO SUB
500: GO TO 340:

600 REM Init variables

610 READ x,y,a,b,c,d,e,f,t,u

620 DATA 0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0,0

630 RETURN

640 REM BASIC-BALL. BY ZXMOE 2025
```

BASICball is a simple free-throw training game. The objective is to score as many points as possible, always from a different, random, location. How long the session will be? This only depends on you. Good luck!

The core of the game is the physics engine. The engine is placed as close to the beginning of the program as possible (line 20), so as to make the engine loop quickest. In every engine loop, the position of the ball is updated according to the horizontal and vertical velocity components, and the vertical velocity component is updated according to gravity. Notice that the previous ball position is also saved.

Code dealing with the interactions of the ball with the environment starts in line 80. The interactive elements on the screen are coded by attribute. A specific line is set-up to deal with each attribute, which is directly reached with a GO TO 80+ATTR(y,x).

Free space is coded as red ink (same color as the ball). The ball is just reprinted when moving through free space.

Walls are coded with blue paper and with black and blue ink for horizontal and vertical walls, respectively. The ball rebounds on walls, reflecting the vertical or horizontal velocity component, keeping most of the ball inertia.

The hoop is coded with cyan ink. Ball rebounds in the hoop reversing both velocity components. A bit more inertia is lost when bouncing in the hoop than when bouncing on walls.

The player is coded as white ink. When the ball bounces in the player, it loses most of its inertia, and the player complains.

The net is coded as magenta ink. The ball drags when moving through the net (It loses horizontal inertia). Also, the “control” variable is updated.

The region above the hoop is coded as yellow ink. It only updates the “control” variable.

One might add new elements by assigning an attribute, and adding a new line to control how the ball must behave when encountering that specific attribute.

To control when the ball goes through the hoop, the game checks that the ball first moves through the control (yellow) region above the hoop, and then through the net (magenta). Any other sequence won’t be counted as a point. The correct sequence is determined through the content of the “control” variable.

The engine tracks the number of times the ball bounces by decreasing a counter. Since the ball losses inertia with each bounce, it is assumed to be still once the bounce counter reaches zero. At this point, the code continues at line 430 (“Ball stops” section), celebrates the point (depending on the control variable), and starts a new throw.

The Ball throwing section, starting at line 340. This code allows to read the angle and power of the throw from they keyboard. The angle is read from the keyboard by pressing ‘o’ & ‘p’. The ball is drawn at an offset from the head using sin and cos functions. However, trigonometric functions are slow. To reduce the time to move a large angle, the rate of angle change increases while keeping a key pressed.

The power of the throw (line 400) is determined by measuring how long the key is pressed. To make this measurement as accurate as possible, and independent of the BASIC interpreter’s speed, it peeks the system variable at address 23558. This memory location holds a decreasing frame counter used by the system to determine when to start repeating a key that is held down. As this variable is updated by the system during retrace interrupts, it allows for an extremely precise reading, completely asynchronous from the BASIC interpreter. For this technique to work correctly, the system variable REPDEL (23561) is set to 255 at the start of the game. This sets the delay for key repetition to its maximum value.

Lines 460 to 500 contain five subroutines to draw the game frame, three different player gestures, and the hoop.

The Main menu section starts at line 510. It simply displays the main screen and keeps it on a hold until a key is hit before jumping into the action. The PAUSE 1: PAUSE 0 sequence is a neat and reliable way to wait for a key press, the first one just for cleaning-up any previously pressed key.

When the program is run, execution starts at line 550 (see GO TO 550 at line 10). This code is executed only once at startup, and then it jumps to the main menu. Here, the OLDPPC and OSSPPC (23662–23664) system variables are configured so that a CONTINUE statement jumps to the start of the engine, slightly improving its speed. The variable REPDEL is also initialized to 255, as explained earlier. Finally, the key game variables are created in the correct order (line 600) to help optimize the engine performance.

As a final comment, key variables are kept single character in length for speed reasons. The following list describes the meaning of all variables used:

x,y : hold the current column and row coordinates of the ball.

a,b: hold the current x & y velocity components, respectively, of the ball

c,d: hold the previous x and y coordinates of the ball.

e: bounce counter.

f: control variable to detect ball pass through the hoop.

t: shooting angle, theta

u: rate of change of theta. Also doubles as shooting power.

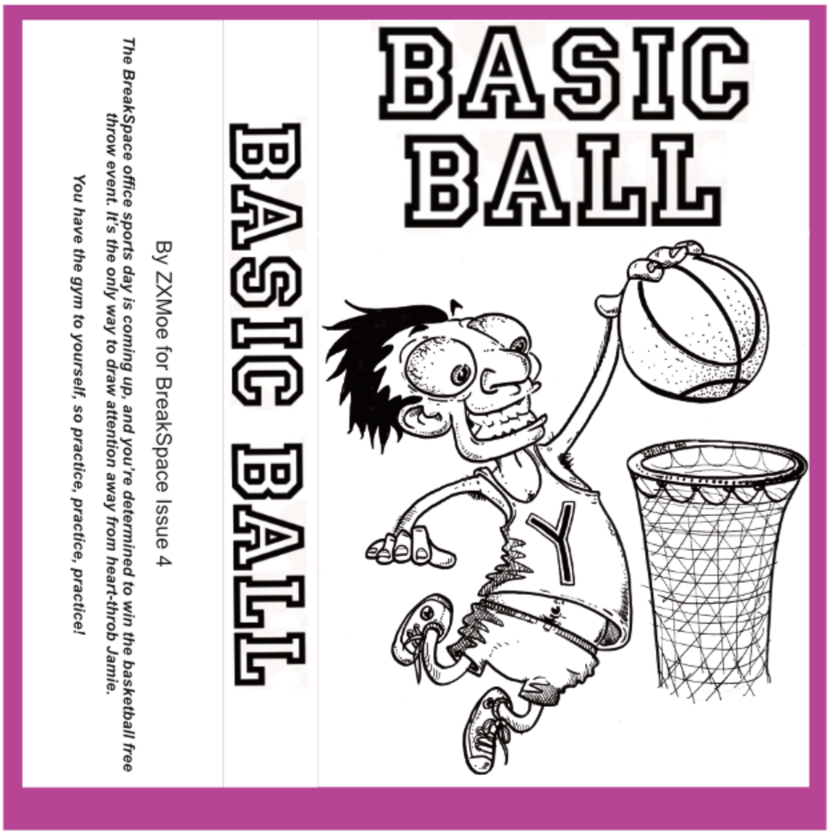
px,py: player position

ns: number of points scored

nt: number of throws

yb: position of the hoop.

By the way, I almost forgot! If you have a 128K Spectrum model, be sure to load the game in 48K BASIC mode for the best performance.



The BreakSpace office sports day is coming up, and you're determined to win the basketball free throw event. It's the only way to draw attention away from heart-throb Jamie.

You have the gym to yourself, so practice, practice, practice!

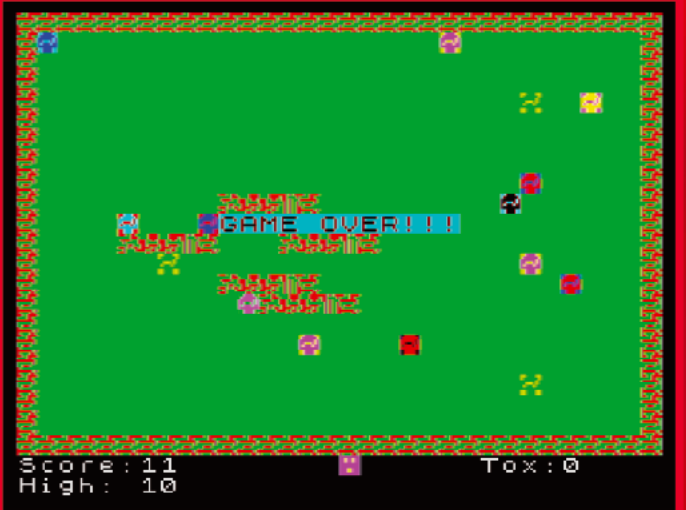
By ZXMoe for BreakSpace Issue 4

Lysergic Mushrooms Desire

Druida 8

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44640

Free


```
GAME OVER!!!
Score:11              Tox:0
High: 10
```

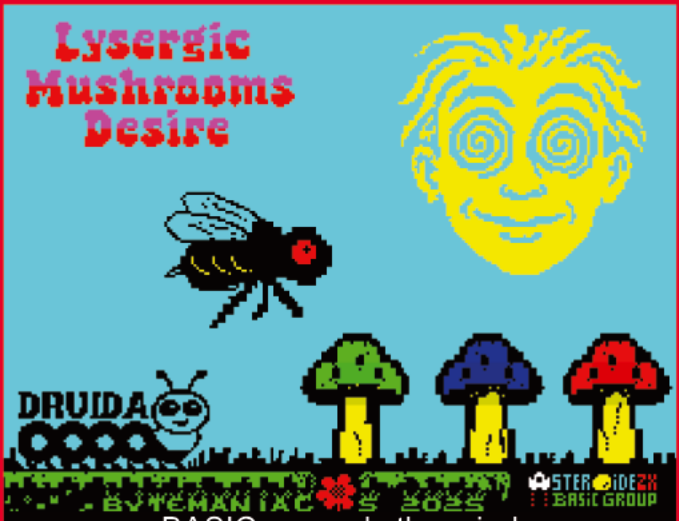
Proof that Shaun is better than the default.

Who doesn't love a Snake-type game? And this one is another BASIC listing too. Fantastic. Though, in this iteration of the classic concept, Lysergic Mushrooms Desire, you are in control of Bzzzy the Bee; for whatever reason, this Bee must collect addictive fungi for his companion Esporaldo, who changes colour according to the fungus that must be collected. Anything else will reduce his toxicity which, when reaching zero, will be game over.

This is a pretty simple affair that, despite its high-level interpreted origins, is quite sharp. There are some UDGs used, but oddly for our protagonist, the Sinclair character set is used with < and > representing left and right, v for down and ↑ for up. Sound effects are simple beeps, of which there are three: one for +1 on your score, one for -1 on your toxicity level, and one for turning. As you tirelessly roam around, or buzz around I guess is more apt here, you must avoid the screen borders and platforms, and any mushrooms that Esporaldo is not asking for. Hitting a red solid mushroom will see you reset to your initial starting position.

For such a simple concept, this game took a surprising amount of my time to beat the default high score, which is only 10. Interestingly, the mushroom needed to be collected changes each time Bzzzy grabs one of the (I guess) edible mushrooms. There is one that isn't, and that's the red on a green background, as mentioned above. Nearly all of the possible combinations are used from Sinclair's attributes, so some will flash, and some will be bright, and some colour combinations are difficult to see, or perhaps on that latter point, it's just my aging eyesight that is the problem.

I find this whole thing oddly compelling, and one that I've come back to at least a few times. Not bad for seven lines of Sinclair BASIC, though its developer clearly knows the quirks and pitfalls of the language very well, as this isn't quite as readable as some games that fall into this category. Worth a few goes? Yes. Worth a few more? Also yes. Give it a try yourself and see how long it'll take you to beat my high score of 11.



BASIC expands the mind

Here I am, looking up words again. Lysergic, as far as I know, means 'like LSD', but I'm no chemist. What does it actually mean?

I tried the Oxford site first, but they wanted money, and NUTS to that. Then Collins, who…didn't have any definition at all, just a forward to Lysergic Acid. Such vagueness simply wouldn't do. So I tried Wiktionary, the free wiki-style dictionary, which came up with something, at least. Specifially :

1 : Blend of (hydro)lys(is) +‎ erg(ot) +‎ -ic (adjective-forming suffix).
2 : ("psychedelic, trippy") refers to the effects of taking the drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

So, kinda circular, and I was kinda right to begin with. Hmmph.
Mushrooms though, is a word I know. So I'm on solid ground there.

Unlike our protagonist Esporaldo, who must maintain a certain level of 'shroom-powered enlightenment, and so has entreated a bee to help him out. Of course he has : he's sufficiently off his goddamned face that talking to bees seems reasonable.

Anyway - this is tough as nails. Poor old Bzzzy moves at a rapid pace to begin with, and isn't slowing down. You've got to keep an eye on where you're headed, mapping the relative left/right controls against your absolute direction constantly while also keeping watch on the very small indicator that tells you which mushroom Esporaldo demands next. Just sting the needy hippy, Bzzzy, and be done with it.

Take some time with it though, and it is, as Shaun says, compelling. Even a little hypnotic. You get into the groove of it, almost reaching a trance state of heightened awareness. The doors of preception flung wide to reveal a world of reckless PAPER, INK and FLASH that blocks out the mundanity of the everyday.

All of which is a long-winded way of delaying an admission that I didn't beat Shaun's score of 11.
Perhaps I wasn't high enough.

Football Manager Revisited

Glen Anderson & Kevin Toms

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/43723

Free

My name is David Sloan and I am an addict. Wow : it's powerful to say that out loud.

My addiction began in 1983. As a footie-obsessed kid I was in my Uncle Jim's computer shop and I clocked a poster of 2 footballers challenging for a ball in front of a large trophy. In the bottom right-hand corner there was a friendly face with a reassuringly tidy beard. "What's that? Can we get that??" I piped up, but little did I know what I was asking for.

Football Manager became an addiction. There was no wall-to-wall football coverage back then, so FM was hugely important to me. I just had to get my midweek fix or disappear into my own world on a Saturday evening after a long journey back from Coleraine where we'd dropped vital points in a close title race. When my team did badly and I was inconsolable, I was always comforted by that friendly disembodied head of Kevin Toms, who always seemed to say, "it's alright Dave. Load this game up & you show them how it's done, Mate."

Growing up, I lost countless hours, days, weeks and months to all manner of football management sims on the Speccy and beyond. Supplementing my love for the real thing with the sweet serotonin that comes with guiding your team of misfits to the very top.

In recent years however, I've fallen out of love with football for various reasons and I no longer have the hours to invest in the modern time sink management sims, with some so complex they need endless hours of tweaking before actually playing a single match.

So when I saw Glen Anderson's Football Manager Revisited project, currently on its 11th edition (FMR25), I was curious to see just how he has managed to bring the Great Grandaddy of them all into the 21st Century. With FMR25, Glen has taken the code of the Speccy original and souped it up to include more features than you could shake a snake at.

I downloaded it to my phone, with the intention of having a quick look before having a proper session on my Speccy. 3 hours later and I'm in trouble! The game lures you in with the familiar simplicity of the original, but keeps you hooked with so many new features

From the off, you're not just restricted to the English league, FMR25 allows you to choose a club from any of the top 2 to 4 tiers of 28 different leagues. I dived right in with the Northern Irish League. I don't know if it's the first ever Speccy game to feature Ballymacash, but it's the first one I've ever seen.

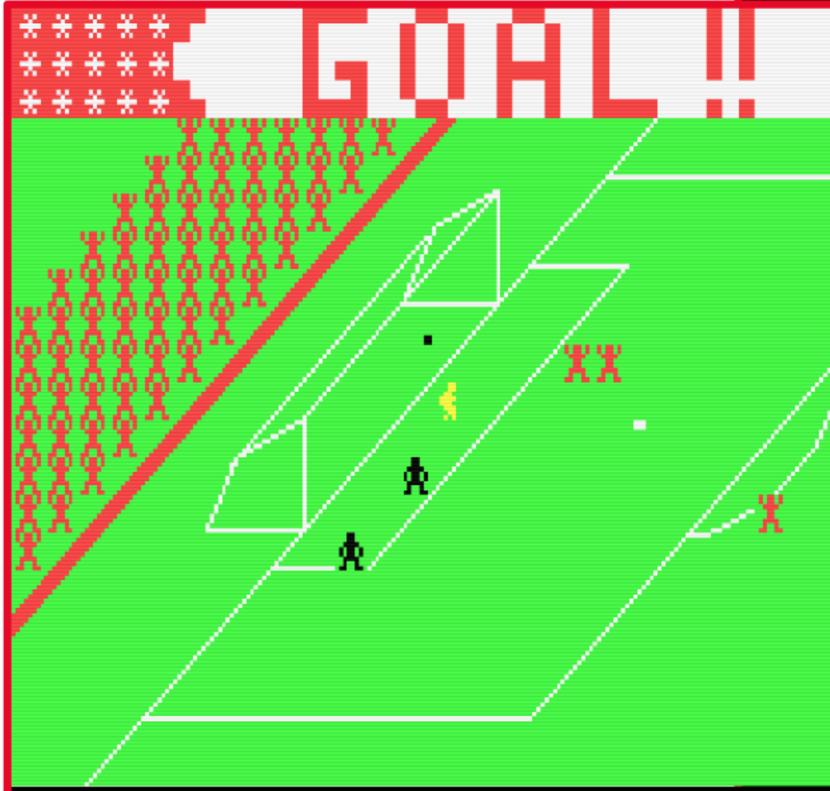
What I love about FMR25 is that it has the familiarity of the original's straightforward interface, but it allows you to tweak so many events, so you feel you have a bit more say in proceedings than just picking the players with the highest skill level.

There are interactions with this press, community events which help boost support (but zap your players' energy), press interactions, youth players, training camps, fines and bans etc etc. Once, when money was running low, I even had a lifelong fan leave the club some money in their Will!

The stickmen highlights are back too, but with animated fans and corporate sponsorship. Alternatively you can skip the highlights and go straight to the result if you're trying to whizz through a season.

All of which had me utterly hooked. Because I had it on my phone, I was playing this game while watching telly with the family, while cooking meals, while on public transport, in bed while I should've been sleeping. At one point during a tense Irish Cup match, I was even doing the housework with my phone in my hand and the vacuum cleaner in the other.

Yes dear readers the addiction is back, and I'm getting every bit as much a buzz from typing 99 to continue at the age of 49 as I did when I was 9.



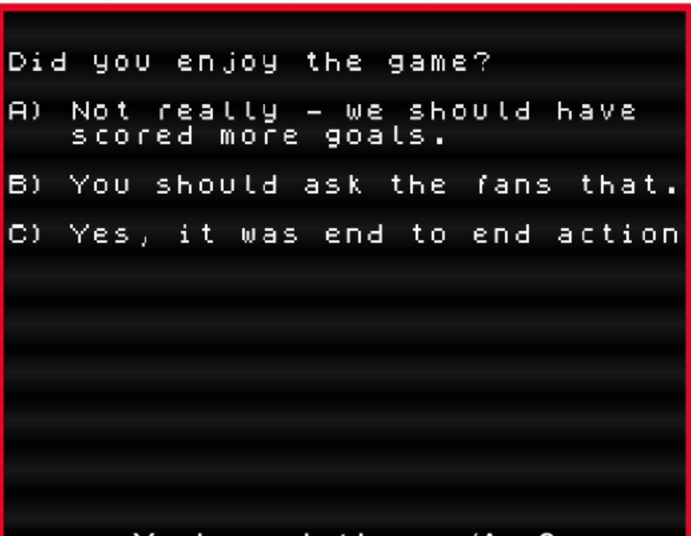
Or Touchdown!! if you're American.

It's fun to have opinions. Good ones, bad ones, stark mad ones. Here's one of little consequence that I occasionally turn over, a kind of pet opinion. An indoor pet, that I don't let out. It's weird and annoying, I suspect, but I like it.

Football Manager is the only actual role-playing game series there is. Final Fantasy doesn't have any roleplaying. Baldurs Gate, for all its dialogue options and stories, doesn't have much. A bit, but it shifts perspective too much. Football Manager though, immerses the player in the role of a sheepskin-wearing grump, doing a job, and doesn't waver. The NPCs, the players, are simple stat lines, but you give them character, build their own little stories over the course of a season. And your own manager persona is expressed through reckless substitutions and ruthless sales of disappointing players.

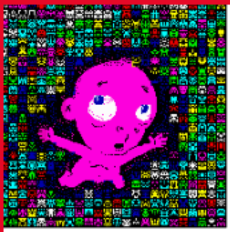
FMR supports the RPG elements of the genre via added dialogue options like the post-match interviews that facilitate that immersion and the whole thing just pulls you in. Sir Kevin of Toms hit on a magic formula that you're surely aware of by now, and this just adds options and control to make the tense match scenes matter even more than before. If there's one flaw in the original, then it's the end-of-season randomisation of the players, which is something that this version doesn't address. And yeah, it's a little sluggish sometimes, and could do with some optimisations or even some more machine code routines to help it along.

But it's hard to criticize a platinum-plated, genre-defining classic like FM, especially when all the added bells and whistles work so well. So, cast all your tributes and rose petals at the feet of Glen Anderson, but only if he promises to share them with Kevin.



```
Did you enjoy the game?

A) Not really - we should have
   scored more goals.

B) You should ask the fans that.

C) Yes, it was end to end action
```

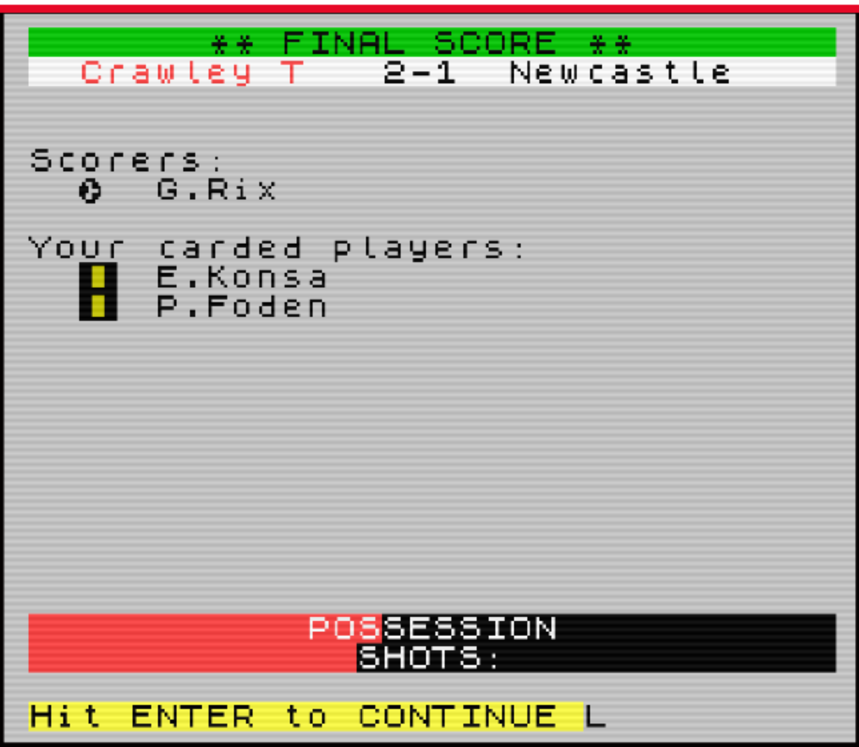
You know what I mean, 'Arry?



Back in 1988, my Dad asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up. Quick as a flash, I answered, "to manage La Horquetta Rangers in the League of Trinidad & Tobago". Dad didn't reply, just walked away muttering. I think he was tired. Looking back, it was a pipe dream. I was never going to get even close to the experience... or was I?

Okay. Football Manager Revisited is the result of twelve years' diligent refinement of Kevin Tom's 1982 masterpiece. The list of expansions, improvements and bugfixes is astonishing. To name a few: extra countries, extra teams, extra time, friendlies, scouts, dynamic playing style adjustment, choice of away kit, youth player investment, and team talks. The table calculations have been sped up, as are the game highlights, which use machine code and thus relegate this game from the Pure BASIC club.

This is Football Manager++. Of course it's great.



```
      ** FINAL SCORE **
  Crawley T    2-1   Newcastle


Scorers:
    G.Rix

Your carded players:
    E.Konsa
    P.Foden









              POSSESSION
               SHOTS:

Hit ENTER to CONTINUE L
```

Dark days down the 'toon

Football Manager Revisited Visited

Sloany's addiction to FM Revisited was becoming a concern, with reviews piling up on his desk, so we gave him a day pass to leave HQ and get some air. Touch grass, as the youngsters say.

Naturally, he took the opportunity to track down Glen Anderson, the game's dedicated author.

Sloany : Firstly thank you for agreeing to have a few words with us, I've been a bit obsessed of late with your game. Do you remember when you first encountered Kevin Toms' Football Manager?

Glen Anderson : In early 1983 in WH Smiths. My brother and I were bought a 48k Spectrum as a joint Christmas present in 1982 - aged 16. I bought the game as I'd always been a football fan. At some point we started to see computers, and I had no idea about the Spectrum except a friend of mine got one, and he told me that it was a wonderful machine - I should get one too. And very cheap. I went to see it at a local store and fell in love immediately.

I could convince my father, who liked that it was not so expensive, and he liked that it was a modular system that you could expand. So I got a 16kb Spectrum. And then spent a whole summer saving money to buy an expansion RAM pack.

S : Nice, right in at the start. Did you ever do any coding back in the day, on Spectrum or otherwise?

GA : Oh yes, plenty. That was part of the appeal of getting a computer rather than a games console like the Atari 2600 which was popular at the time.

I mainly wrote BASIC games, but I did write a (relatively simple) spreadsheet and word processor too, which my boss at work at the time actually used!

Initially coding was all in Spectrum BASIC but after a year or two I bought a book to learn assembly language and also to disasemble the Spectrum ROM.

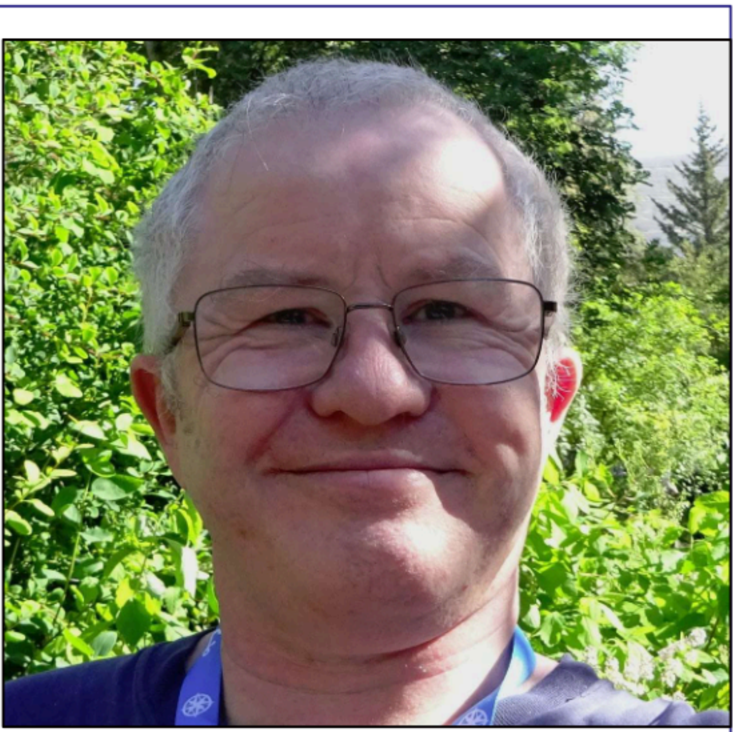
S : Extremely impressive stuff! So when did you first break into the Football Manager code and start tinkering about?

GA : I probably first broke into it shortly after buying it to see how it worked, but I don't remember altering it at that time. In 2012, I hadn't had anything to do with Spectrums since 1991 when I bought my first PC, but I came across the World Of Spectrum website with its huge archive of free Spectrum games. Out of curiosity, I downloaded an emulator and a few games that I remembered, including Football Manager.

S : I was really taken back at the sheer number of new features you've managed to cram into the game, what are the favourite things you've added?

GA : Graphically, I like the crowd who react when their team scores a goal, and also penalty shootouts in the cup competitions! Other features I like are the proper round-robin fixture sets (which took an age to compile), the semi-humourous media questions, being able to play a player out of position (at a reduced skill level) and the addition of youth players.

BS : I'm a huge fan of all of those features! I've made good use out of playing players out of position and the youth system.



Are you ever tempted to give your favourite team(s) a bit of a stats boost in the game?

GA : No. I tend to let the computer randomly choose the team in most cases anyway as I'm often playing the game to test new features. I'm a Leeds fan, so I'm used to their ups and downs in any case!

BS : Ha-ha! For the best. Do you ever play any of the modern Football Management Sims?

GA :I used to play the EA Sports Total Club Manager and FIFA Manager series back in the 2000's but I've never been a fan of Championship Manager. Once I started re-developing Football Manager in 2012, I didn't really have time to play any others and I'm not sure my PC would run the modern ones.

BS : Same here, mine slowed down to a crawl when I tried a few years back.

Finally, do you have any tips for success in the game?

GA : The game essentially boils down to the resource management of team skill, team morale and finance. I'd always use the training camp at the start of the season as this boosts the skills and energy of the players. You can make some money in the transfer market if you can get players with cheap offers and sell others at a profit. Also, when comparing your team against the opposition, remember to compare your defence against their attack and vice-versa. Finally, look at the Manager's Guidance Notes document bundled with the game, there's quite a few tips in there.

S :Phenomenal stuff. Thanks for your time, Glen.

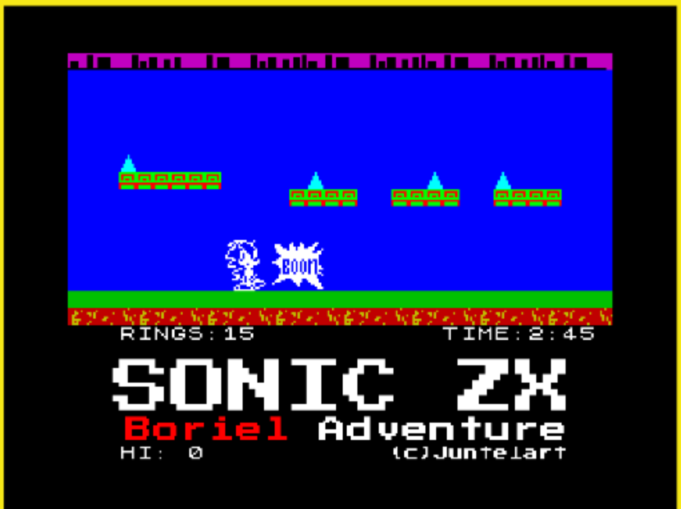
Right, I'm off to see if I can finally get this lot promoted.

Sonic ZX : Boriel Adventure

Juntelart

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45148

PWYW / €2



Sonic Boom!

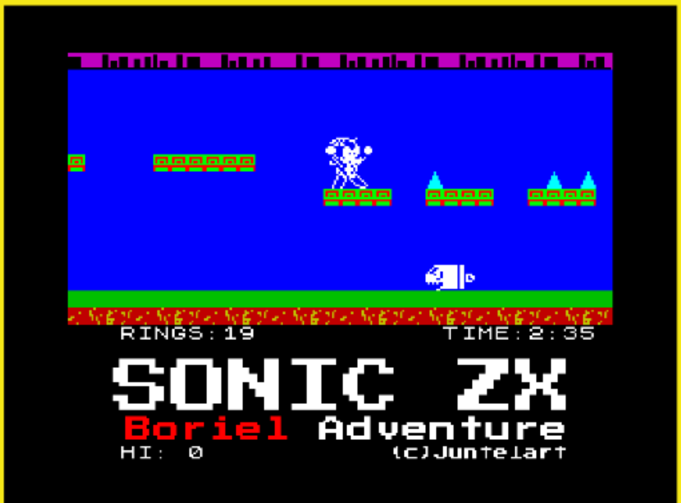
Back in the early days of Retro Gamer magazine they had the genius idea of producing a one off special issue of Your Sinclair. (A ZX Spectrum magazine in the 21st Century? It'll never work!) It was in the pages of that resurrected mag that I saw a preview article of Anestis Koutsoudis' SonicZX, an ambitious looking game that promised to bring Sega's spiky blue mascot to the home of Horace, Magic Knight and Miner Willy. Of course in my head this was a couple of years ago rather than practically a quarter of a century, as the "actual Gregorian calendar" seems to imply.

Still, I've often wondered what happened to this and whether someone would one day make a Sonic style game on the Speccy. Well it would appear that Raül Torralba (aka Juntelart) has picked up the baton, unleashing a Speccy Sonic game which he has coded in Boriel BASIC no less! You can see from the screenshots it looks the part, but how does it play?

Evolved from a tech demo, it's not the full bells and whistles Sonic experience, but rather an endless runner style affair. You take control of an extremely recognisable depiction of our blue speedy hero with the aim of the game being to collect as many rings as you can before either the time runs out or you hit a spike or rocket.

Your character fairly zips about in a manner befitting his heritage and the scrolling is surprisingly smooth. It's not just a pretty face though, it's an addictive little blighter. You only get one life and when you come a cropper there's that "one more go" feel as you try to get that wee bit further and scoop up a few more rings than last time.

All in all this is a fantastic showcase for the power of Boriel BASIC and really displays what it can produce in the right hands. It's certainly entertained me a lot more than some of the official Sonic games released in the wilderness years of the early 2000s. The only thing missing is an intro where the blue blur scoots past the Sinclair logo to the strains of a synthesized voice screaming "SIIIN-CLAAAAIR"!



Say 'Gah!'

If you, like me, remember the early 1990s, there was one question that everybody else was asking, and that was Mario, or Sonic? As someone who didn't own either a Sega or Nintendo, my answer was either both, or neither. And in any case, going from home computers of the 1980s to something without a keyboard always felt like a downgrade. But anyway, since these days, we've had both Sonic and Mario make unofficial appearances on our favourite 8-bit since then, and this is the latest example. And thankfully Sega aren't so bothered about fan-made projects like this as the big N.

The first thing that you notice about Sonic ZX - Boriel Adventure is that it's fast. No pixel scrolling here, but things are smooth enough for you not to notice. And Sonic himself looks great in Sinclair colours. Essentially, this offering is a speed runner's delight; zip around from left to right and collect the Golden-ish rings. The more you collect, the better, as the task isn't to get further into the game, but to beat your old high score representing how many rings you nabbed. Though you do have a time limit, also you only have one life, and as yet, I've not played far enough into the game to elapse said limit.

Simple platforms pass you by, all of which are always in reach, and along the level floor an occasional bomb will head towards you that must be avoided. Occasionally, this will have a bonus clock to add seconds to play. And obviously, avoid any spikes on said platforms.

Overall, this is a commendable effort, but the controls aren't quite as sharp as they could be; it feels like speed has sacrificed some of the core game mechanic. But regardless of this, it does feel like a Sonic game on the old Speccy, so what's not to love about that?

The 90s were packed with pop-culture feuds. Finally, BreakSpace can now DEFINITIVELY answer WHAT'S BEST?

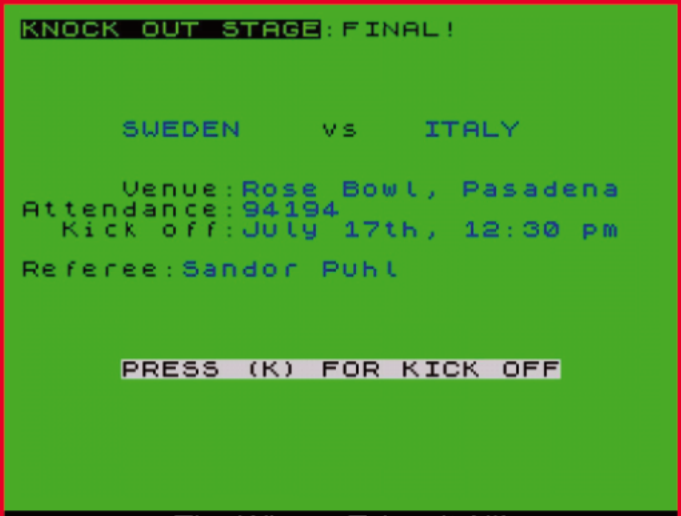
The Rivalry	The Winner
Britney vs. Christina	Stina Nordenstam
N'SYNC vs BackStreetBoys	Throbbing Gristle
Harry Potter vs Actual Literature	The Judge Dredd Megazine
SEGA vs Nintendo	WONDERSWAN
OASIS vs Blur	Super Furry Animals
Biggie vs Tupac	The 2nd Amendment

GOLD RUSH '94-The Run for Bronze

2L8 Software

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44702

Free



```
KNOCK OUT STAGE:FINAL!

      SWEDEN     vs    ITALY

      Venue:Rose Bowl, Pasadena
Attendance:94194
   Kick off:July 17th, 12:30 pm

Referee:Sandor Puhl


         PRESS (K) FOR KICK OFF
```

The Winner Takes it All!

As someone whose life was once built around following international football, but has since become somewhat disillusioned with the sport, it's good to look back at a time when I wasn't so jaded. As such, in the aftermath of the grotesque spectacle that was the draw for the 2026 World Cup (the first to be held in the USA since 1994) it seems fitting that we have a game based upon the last time the competition was played in the States.

GR94-TRFB is a unique take on the footie management sim. Rather than giving you countless teams, tournaments and players, you are given one team (Sweden) with one goal (the 1994 World Cup) and no transfer market. You simply have at your disposal, the actual squad of players that Sweden took to said tournament IRL.

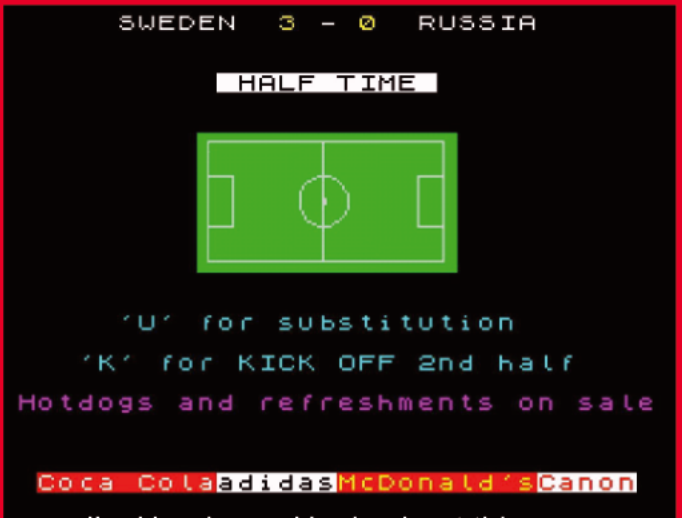
As restrictive as this sounds, it makes for much snappier gameplay than the in-depth footie management Behemoths that take up months of your life. Think of it as the accessible arcade racer like Power Drift to FMR's admin heavy Gran Turismo.

You start off with an impressive digitised pic of the Swedish striker Kennet Andersson in all his 94 World Cup glory, before you're straight into the game with a simple menu offering the choice of picking your team or viewing either the league table or the next match details. Once you've picked your 11 men & 2 subs, you can go straight into the action by choosing option 4.

When you do, there's no stick men highlights here, just an overview of the pitch and a running text commentary below. You do have the ability to influence matches however by bringing on a well timed sub, you also get a nice little noise to indicate when a goal has been scored. When games are underway, it's easy to get quite invested as the timer counts up to 90 while you roar your team of Scandinavian superstars to victory.

It took me many attempts and in the end it certainly felt I got there more through luck than good judgement, but the ride was utterly thrilling at times as our little guys edged ever closer to emulating and surpassing the heroes of '94. Given that the subtitle is "Race for the Bronze", it's not entirely clear if actually winning the World Cup is considered a success or failure, but I went ahead and won it anyway, so there!

I'm not saying it's niche, but this game is ideal if you are a Swedish Spectrum owning footie fan, who enjoys uncomplicated management sims about a very specific tournament. So if you're in that particular Venn diagram (Sven diagram?) then boy have we got a game for you!



```
   SWEDEN   3 - 0   RUSSIA

         HALF TIME


      'U' for substitution
    'K' for KICK OFF 2nd half
 Hotdogs and refreshments on sale

 Coca ColaadidasMcDonald'sCanon
```

I'm Head over Heels about this one.

The 1994 World Cup, eh? Stars and Stripes, late night matches, water bags, Striker the dog, that Spain - South Korea match, Baggio bangers, Baggio's penalty, Nigeria heroics, Stoichkov, Hagi, Branco, McGrath, Klinnsmann. Al-Owairan channeling Maradona. And actual Maradona, I guess. Pretty good tournament, all in all, back when FIFA were at more acceptable levels of corruption. And then there was Sweden, finishing third. The mad lads.

Which was a pretty good result, but Sweden had done that before, even finishing second in 1958. So maybe the only thing that would really do would be a win. And why not? They had a squad that wasn't far off, and, if Sloany's to be believed, could well have pulled it off. It's an interesting twist on a Footy Manager game, although perhaps a little specific.

It does make for a game with very little choice, of course, as you can just pick your team, maybe pop on a sub, and hope for the best. Players only have one stat, an out-of-10 rating, plus their position, so there isn't even much choice to be had there. The matches pass by pretty quickly, with just some text to indicate how it's going between goals, but it can still serve up tense moments in the knockout stages as you hang on to a slender lead or chase a winner. If you're a keen Swede, you'll know exactly which players you're shouting at, and even if you don't know your Ravellis from your Brolins, you'll get to know their names pretty soon.

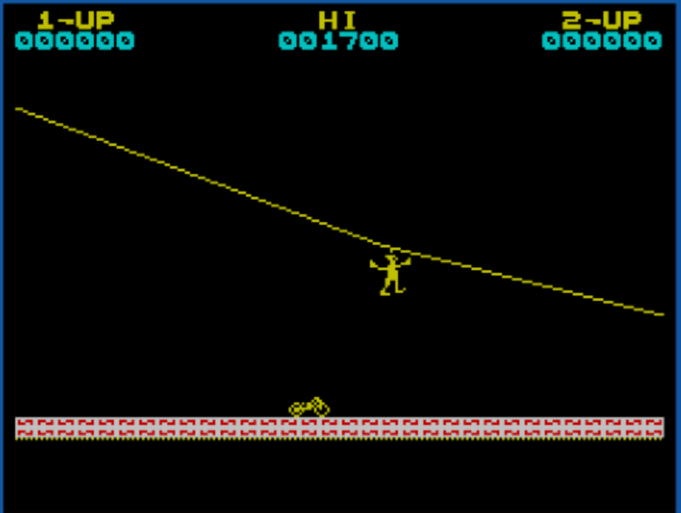
It's tricky, and does seem like there's a lot of luck involved. Every failure redraws the groups, and you'll need to benefit from a lucky path to the finals if you're planning to actually win. And that's about it. A nicely presented, very specific manager game that does exactly what it says on the tin. Perhaps for an encore, 2L8 can make a version about England's qualifying campaign. Can *you* do better than Graham Taylor?

Boris and the Buses

Clockwork Robot

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44799

£14 (Cassette) / £45 (Interface 2 Cartridge)



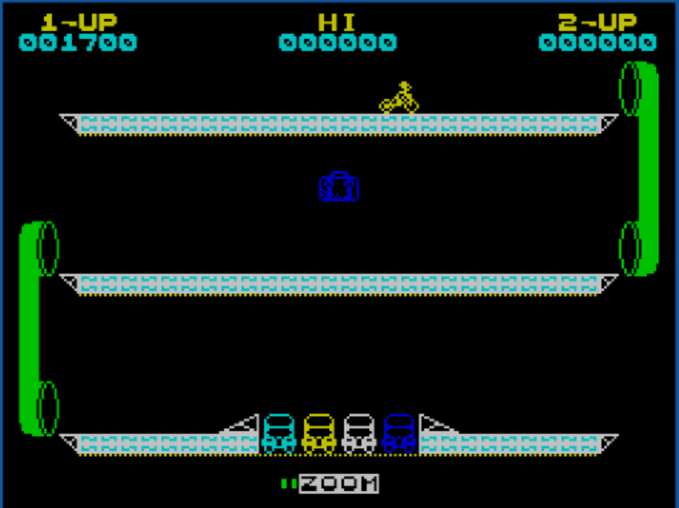
Boris, about to launch off the (Party) line

What's the point of making a Spectrum game? Obviously that varies for each author. In this case, Jim from Clockwork Robot continues his art / craft journey building out-of-time entertainments with modern sensibilities. He's designed and published Vectrex games. A cathode-tube wristwatch. Mechanical proto-pinball games. And now, a Spectrum game available on cassette and Interface 2 cart (hence the eye-watering prices above). I balk at learning AGD or Kwyll properly, while this guy is happy to not only learn ASM, but also how to model and produce the PCBs and housing for Interface 2 carts. It's enough to make a fella feel unproductive.

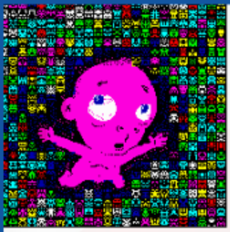
The game, intended as a dig at professional buffoon Boris Johnson, casts the Ex-Prime Minister as a daredevil motorbike stuntman. 'But', you may think, 'Boris Johnson isn't qualified to perform motorcycle stunts, nor does he display any traits that suggest aptitude in that arena.' And you'd be right, but the only real qualification Evel Knievel had was a reckless self-belief, and lack of aptitude has certainly never seemed like an impediment to Boris before. So, we have a 2-stage arcade game. In stage one, Boris hangs from a zipline, waving a pair of flags, intending to carefully time his fall so that he lands on a passing motorbike. Simple, and rather more impressive than the his real-life zipline antics. Stage two is slightly more complex. Boris must carefully manage his motorbike's speed as he approaches a row of buses. At the right pace, he'll Eddie Kidd himself over and land successfully. Too fast or too slow and he'll come a cropper, more like Evel Knievel at Wembley. As the levels progress, Boris will also have to dodge a bouncing briefcase as he accelerates towards the ramp. A metaphor for BJ ignoring the serious business of Government in favour of the razzmatazz of Politics? Perhaps. Either way, after a few jumps, it's back to the zip-line level, and on it goes. A kind of OurouBoris, if you will.

Graphically, it's colourful and attractive, with some well-realised animations on the tiny motorbike sprite as it wheelies, jumps and crashes out. The controls are snappy and precise, and while there isn't a *lot* of game here, it's decent fun for a short while.

But the actual game doesn't seem to be the main point for the author, rather a part of the whole physical process. You may have noted the prices in the header above - this is only available in physical editions, on cassette or custom made Interface 2 cartridge. If you're a collector of physical games, or even just a committed Boris-disliker, you'll see the point of that too.



You wait ages, then 4 buses at once. Typical.



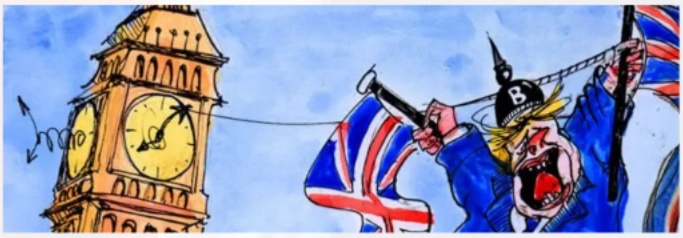
Boris and the Buses had an unusual release. It was advertised for sale on Facebook with an accompanying online blog on the author's Clockwork Robot site. I'd describe the overall package as irritatingly good—everything made from scratch and a homemade ROM cartridge presented as if it was the most natural thing in the world. I wouldn't be surprised if the inlay card is from trees felled with an axe he forged himself. And despite claiming to be 'no cartoonist', his inlay art is more Ralph Steadman than Ralph Steadman!

This game skews old-school classic era—its main influence being Atari Stunt Cycle, with hints of Manic Miner, Wheelie, and Morris Meets the Bikers. The backstory is based on the antics of everyone's favourite professional buffoon, so we're jumping over Brexit buses and avoiding the marauding cakes, suitcases and bottles of wine that were all traps of the Partygate scandal. Author James G. Watt is keen to point out however, that while he's no fan of Boris, this game is intended as light-hearted and not an attempt to bring down the establishment.

Games coded in assembly from the ground up are fairly rare these days, so everything feels a bit fresh. It took me a while to habituate to the physics, but they work. So when I overcook a jump and land on one wheel I know I messed up and not the game.

There's no music, but the low growling beeper engine noise is used to great effect. Great enough to make me want to hear it on real hardware because I'm sure that's how this author intended it. We have so much to be thankful for in these days of emulation, but it's a shame that few of us will experience real beeper sound in all its raw & muffled glory again.

Boris will be falling on his arse a lot. Back in his zip line days, he would have clumsily got up, twiddled his fingers and said something along the lines of "golly aren't I a clot". You don't see that in the game, but you do get some digitised speech reiterating Boris's own sign-off from Parliament: "Hasta La Vista, Baby".



Operation Bee

Hikoki

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44715

Free

Shaun won't like this one. Not because he's scared of numbers or anything, more that he doesn't like Jetpac-style vertical thrust games. Which is what we're dealing with here, crossed with the numbers round from Countdown.

The instructions suggest that you're a bee, but feel free to be whatever you like in this game., Maybe a bee, or a helicopter, or Carol Vorderman with rocket boots. It doesn't matter so much. In practice, you're a mathematical operator, (+. -. /,*) that flits about the screen collecting numbers. These numbers are then applied to your running total, using your current operator. Each level gives you a target, and you need to hit that target to win, within a tight time limit.

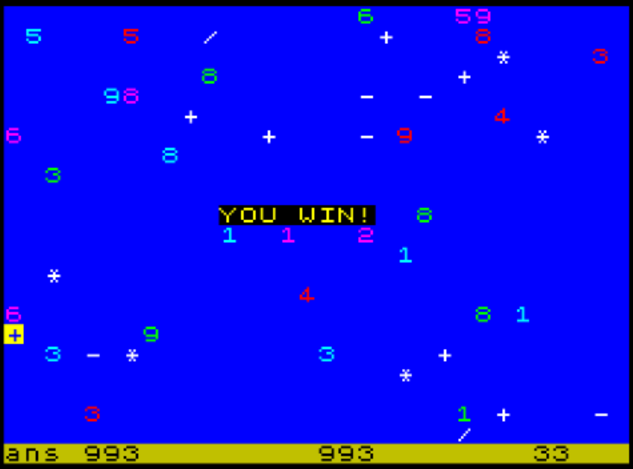
An example : you need a total of 423. Starting out as a +, you pick up a 9 and a 5, making 14. Then you pick up a *, and a 4. 4 * 14 is 56. Then you need a -, and another 9, bringing you back down to 47. And, as any fool knows, 47 times 9 is 423. So you need to flap your way over to another *, and then a 9. Victory!

And that's about the size of it.

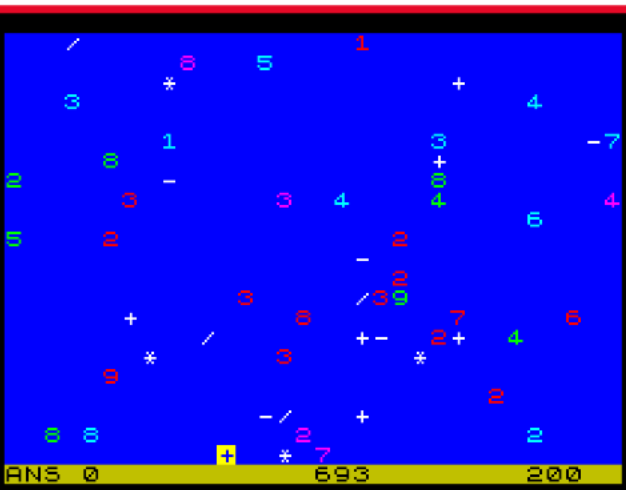
The challenge of course, is that the controls, while responsive, are fast and tricky. And if you do pick up a number you weren't aiming for, or with the wrong operator, then you'll find your plans derailed utterly. Trying to do emergency arithmetic on the fly against the clock can be difficult, it turns out.

Failure, pleasingly, lets you try the same level again. Levels are randomly generated, with success taking you back to the menu. Each play only takes a few seconds, with no progression or score or anything of the sort. Which is why it all fits in a tiny 40-line BASIC listing, which is included in the download. Written by Hikoki (who provided the Drift Diver type-in in Issue 3) this is a nice and responsive bit of code for those of you dabbling in BASIC.

And if you're not, then it's also a fun diversion, which might even, finally, help with your homework.



A winner is me.



Helpfully, the game pauses at the start, allowing planning time.

According to Wikipedia, the fear of numbers is referred to as Numerophobia, Arithmophobia, or Mathematics Anxiety.

It also says that there are 2 types, which is even more terrifying, if you're an arithmaphobe. Unlucky.

Thanks Mpk, now I've got "Hey Hey 16k" stuck in my head! Still, it could be worse given some of the dreadful pop tunes that rattle about in there sometimes.

So then - an edutainment game is it? Good stuff, being a bit of a swot at school, I used to enjoy these. In fact I had one that gave you "11 plus" questions that I wish I'd kept hold of as it's the sort of thing that goes for loadsamoney in certain circles. Still, I digress.

The concept of Operation Bee is so simple and yet ingenious.I like the way you're not against the clock, but against the number of "moves" you do. It took me a few goes to get the first number but I kept coming back for more. I found each number took fewer & fewer goes to get as cogs in my brain I've not used in the decades since leaving school began to turn.

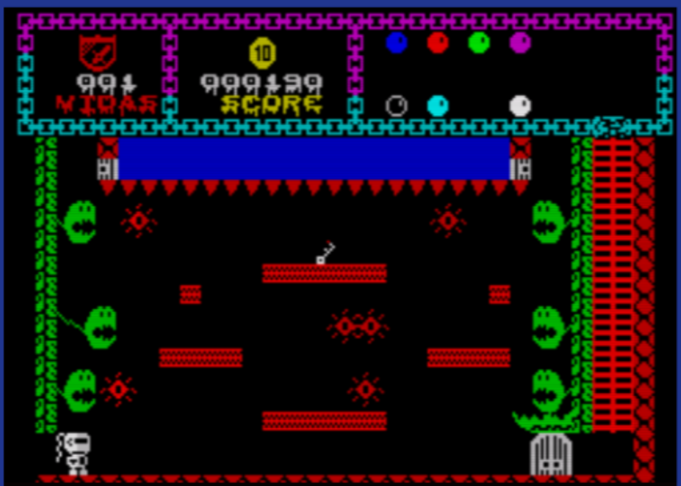
I found this game to be charming and unintrusive and a very clever use of BASIC. I could even see myself adding it to my dailies of word games & puzzles that I use in a futile attempt to wake my brain up of a morning.

Catshell

Thorlinvoo

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44668

Free



Not a CATS chance in HELL Mpk could get this far! (Completed it , Mate - Ed)

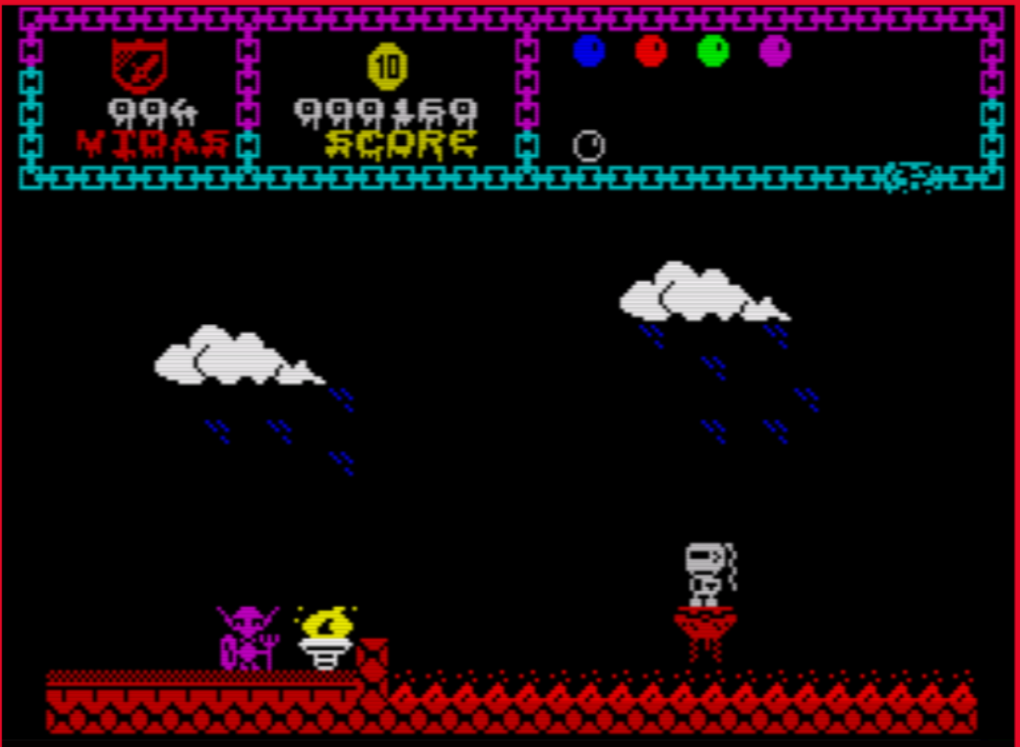
In this MPAGD platformer, you take control of the oddly named "Catshell" on a quest to collect eight power orbs and a sword that will make you the "great" knight. That's about as much plot as we get. I tried to reach the end to see if there was an explanation for what the power orbs actually did—or why our knight has such a lovely long blonde ponytail, and what conditioner he uses...but I could only find seven orbs before getting hopelessly stuck. So those questions will have to remain unanswered!

The game is in Spanish, but don't worry, the messages that pop up are fairly self-explanatory, and you won't need a B1 diploma to figure out what's going on. Every time you find an orb, it opens a new door, and the game's map slowly expands. Controls are simple, but you'll need to master switching between the long jump and short jump (Q and SPACE) if you want to get very far!

There's no soundtrack to speak of - apart from the typical "squelch" sound when you lose a life and the gentle pitter-patter of tiny feet as our hero darts around. The lack of music doesn't bother me; I like to give games their own soundtrack in my head while playing. Try it! As you guide the knight around the screens, hum Club Tropicana by Wham! to yourself. Works for me.

There are some fiendishly well-thought-out rooms that require a bit of dexterity to get through, especially in the final stretch of the game. And here's a tip: the coins magically reappear when you re-enter a room, so you can fill up on points without the graft. Yes, yes - I know that's technically "cheating," but it's only cheating 'a little bit' - like asking for help with a crossword clue or fiddling your tax return.

There are some frustrating moments that had me gnawing on my Kempston, and the game doesn't quite do enough to stand out among games of a similar ilk. But judging by the developer's comments on Itch, the game was made with a lot of passion for his wife and family. If the intention was to create a good, solid Spectrum game for people to enjoy, this can be classed as a resounding success!



Just your typical night out in Bournemouth

Building on Jon's thorough look, I want to highlight the game's most defining—and divisive—feature: its chaotic charm.

He's right about the solid foundation and the clear, passionate intent. But the true personality of Catshell emerges in its delightful weirdness and its occasionally infuriating execution. To be clear, the collision detection is ridiculous. It imagines a 16x16 box of invisible death around every object, no matter how small, as a literal gameplay mechanic. And it's not always clear what will kill you: that lamp isn't background—I'd say it's instant death, but you actually die about five pixels before it, so it's something quicker than an instant. Faster-than-instant-death?

Is this part of the charm, or is it a deal-breaker? Ultimately, I say it's part of it! The sprite design feels wonderfully random: a knight, a mushroom, a chicken, all sharing the same pixelated universe. It shouldn't work, yet it creates a peculiar, hand-drawn atmosphere that's oddly endearing.

To echo Jon's final point: this is clearly a labour of love. That love shines through the rough edges, giving the game a genuine heart. With a few tweaks to polish those collisions and clarify the hazards, this charming oddity could transform from a curious artifact into a game I'd genuinely want to see through to the end. As it stands, it's a fascinating and heartfelt spectacle.

Roshi Milk Course

SplatterSoft

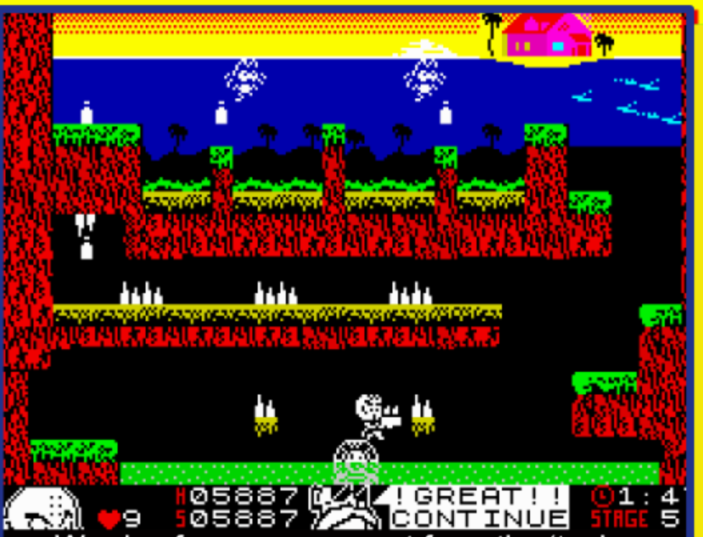
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44736

PWYW / $2

For the uninitiated, Dragon Ball is a late 1980's Japanese anime cartoon and comic book. As an early landmark of the genre, it introduced all the tropes we associate with 'Manga' to the world: Chibi proportions, gaping mouthed screams, and liberal use of speed lines. It's one of the cute ones*, as opposed to the serious anime that served as highbrow hedge porn for some of us back in the day.

Roshi Milk Course follows episode 17, where Master Roshi puts young Krillin & Goku through their paces delivering milk across Kame Island. It's worth a watch if you can find it on YouTube (as long as it's one not soiled by content providers' vacuous ramblings masquerading as commentary). You have to collect 5 bottles per level and return them to Roshi within the time limit, while evading the traps and baddies. Dragon Ball aficionados will be able to spot characters from the series throughout.

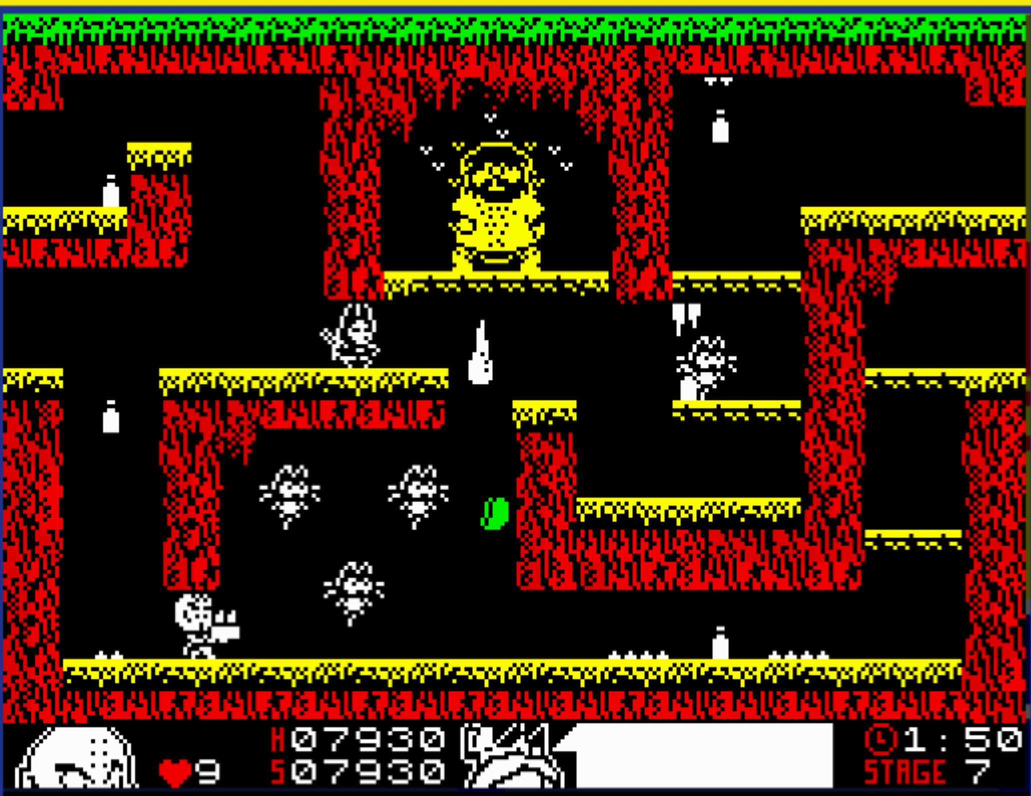
This may all sound like standard platform fare, and it is, but the gameplay and presentation captures the cartoon's madness & humour so well that it could have been an official release rather than a modern tribute. The game treats us exactly as Master Roshi would: it gives us a comic yet deadly task to perform, under cruelly difficult conditions, with him spurring us on in the background. I say 'cruelly difficult', but that's only initially. My first attempt had enough instadeaths and rash mistakes for a 5 minute blooper reel. Beyond that, the 15 levels are entirely completable with some noteworthy design along the way (in the 'Ooh I might nick that idea' kind of way). Once you complete side A playing as Krillin, you get a password to repeat all the same levels on side B as Goku. Why? Because that's exactly what Master Roshi would have demanded.



Words of encouragement from the 'tache

I first winced when I saw a time limit, but it's really not a problem. The challenges are on the screen, not in racing the clock. There are several Dragon Ball tunes, which speed up as time gets short, but it shows the authors' great attention to detail as it's a feature you'll rarely hear.

Splatter Soft is a new team formed from some already established developers: Juntelart, Greenwebsevilla and Xeif. I don't know what tangled web of events led to them teaming up, but it's resulted in the absolute treat that is Roshi Milk Course. It's a game that transcends the ZXGM engine used to make it, just as you can exceed Master Roshi's expectations with your dairy delivery skills.



Giant Haystacks has let himself go.

Much like my esteemed colleague, when I first began to guide Krillin through his calcium capers, I suffered numerous pratfalls that would've no doubt won me £250 had I sent them into "You've Been Framed".

If you're an avid reader of Break Space though, you'll be aware that single screen collect 'em ups to me are what donuts are to Homer Simpson. So on I ploughed and ended up having an extremely enjoyable evening working my way through the levels.

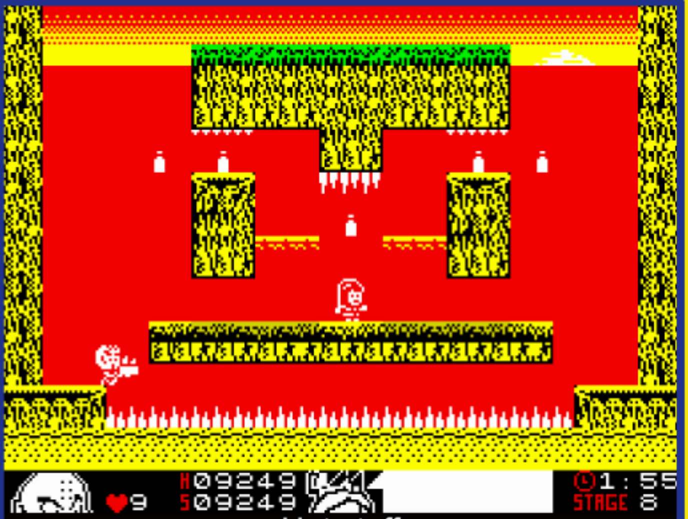
The graphics are superb and make me wish I knew a bit more about its inspiration so I could enjoy the references. As far as I was aware Dragon Ball Zed was some sort of Pokémon wannabe, but I have since been assured that that is not the case by my Pokémon obsessed son. Apparently it's got more to do with the Journey to the West legends that inspired the old Monkey telly series.

As beautiful as the game is on the eyes though, the key factor here is level design, it is completely on point and makes for a rather satisfying game to play through. The difficulty curve is perfect, with the various hazards introduced in a sensible order, ensuring you are fully drilled to tackle the later levels.

One thing I'm struggling to get past though, why "Roshi Milk Course" when Dragon Ball ZX was right there?? D'oh!!

I am old enough to know what Dragon Ball, and its successor, is, but from a part of the world where I missed it, or at least I don't remember it being on British TV back when I'd avidly await the latest Real Ghostbusters or Transformers cartoon. Fortunately, my daughter is something of an Animé aficionado, and although she's more interested in My Hero Academia, she briefly explained some key points about the Dragon Ball so that I know enough, especially its protagonists. Anything but reading the cassette inlay: nothing changes!

In accepting Master Roshi's challenge of collecting milk for delivery, and taking control of Krillin on the first tape, you are put right into the Dragon Ball world with all of its pitfalls and dangers. Rather pleasingly, each level wraps around, and there is some back tracking. Whilst early levels are challenging, they are also great fun to play through. I can see the effort put in here. The zippy and easy to control sprites really pop in lovely Speccy RGB. AY Music is pleasing too, accompanying the game really well.



Hot stuff

Although I've not got to tape two yet, I'm really enjoying this production, though it did take a bit of learning; the spikes especially take some practice to time correctly. This is a highly recommended release and one especially for any fans of the Dragon Ball franchise. Play it. Love it. Play it some more. Rinse and repeat!

Dawn of Crap

The Origins of the comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition

In 1996, Lee ‘Blood’ Tonks had a terrible idea. And there’s been no stopping it since.

Text by Lee Tonks

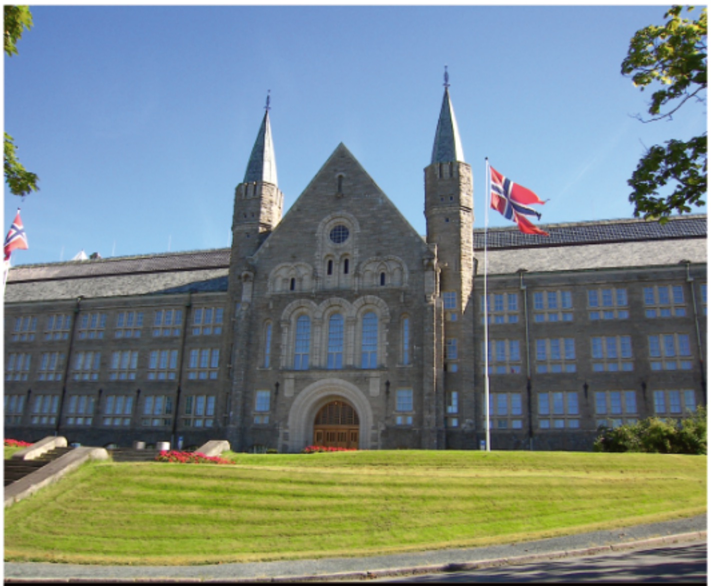
As we find ourselves hurtling headlong into the space year 2026, one of the things that warms my cockles the most about the still-booming Speccy scene is the persistence of the CSSCGC, or the comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition. This year's compo marks a mighty **30 years** since it all began, and although some of you may not realise it, I know this all too well because I was there at the very beginning of the journey. Take a seat by the Toastrack's heat sink, and I'll tell you a story.

Lee, yesterday

The year was 1996. John Major's government were in the final throes of incompetency, Dolly the sheep was fresh out of the cloning vat, and Cadbury were launching the Fuse bar (which I haven't thought of in years but now that I have I think I'd probably kill a man for). And I, as fresh-faced junior software engineer at my first real job, found myself with a lot of time on my hands. As a newbie I was doing all the boring, repetitive tasks that no one else wanted to do, but it wasn't all bad as it left a lot of time for pursuing my other main interest - the Internet revival of my beloved Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

I'd been a huge Spectrum fan since 1983, and had discovered Spectrum emulation a few years earlier whilst investigating the early Internet during my University work placement year. Using DOS-based emulators like JPP and Z80, I'd gotten completely back on board the 8-bit train that I thought I'd left behind when I'd moved 'down South' without my beloved Speccy collection (it was all still safely tucked away in my parents' loft, don't panic, chums). My mission at that time was to collect as many old games as I could so I could play them on my PC.

The Internet of the mid-90s was a very different beast to the AI-infested corporate bin-fire we endure today. It was small, it was fast, it had no adverts, and it was almost all text-based - it was by the geeks, for the geeks. The Web was still in its infancy and the likes of World of Spectrum were still some ways off in the future, so if you wanted Speccy content you had two choices - Usenet, and FTP. I did both, with gusto - comp.sys.sinclair was the newsgroup where all the cool Speccy kids hung out, and where my pals knew me as 'The Infamous Blood' (cringe hadn't been invented yet, remember) Although there were many FTP sites which offered Spectrum games, the king of them all was NVG. After I basically badgered the site's moderator, Arnt Gulbrandsen until he threw the keys at me to shut me up, I was in charge of sorting the incoming Spectrum files for the NVG archive.

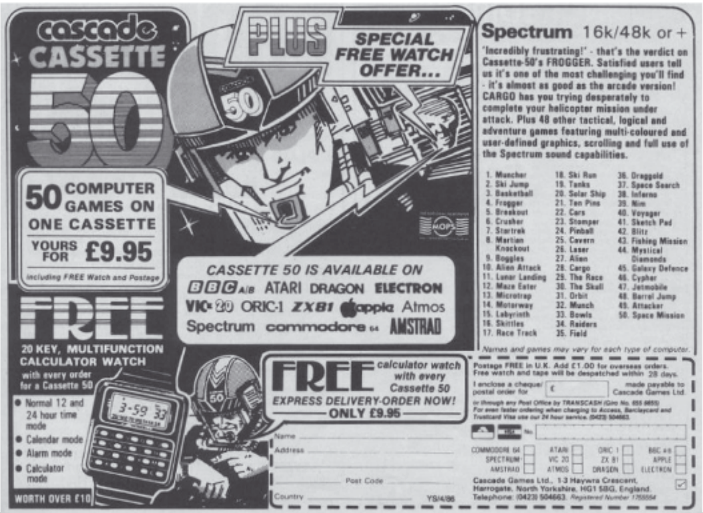


The Norwegian University of Science and Technology, host of the infamous ‘Nettverksgruppa’ or NVG

It might be surprising to those of you who joined the scene later, but in 1996 we didn't have a complete archive of Spectrum games. There were many holes in the collection, including some very famous titles (I still remember excitedly skiving off early from a work training course around this time because someone had finally uploaded a 128K snapshot of Ocean's 'Tai Pan' which I just couldn't wait to play again). As a result of this, I began to collate a list on NVG, cross-posted often to c.s.s., called the 'Missing in Action List' (yeah, that might be where that turn-of-phrase originates too).

And one of the stand-out titles on there was a little compilation called Cassette 50.
Cassette 50 was released by Cascade in 1983 for the Spectrum (and most other 8-bit micros of the time) and

boasted a massive 50 games *plus* a free calculator digital watch, all for the low, low price of £9.95. It sounded too good to be true, and that's because it was - every single game in the collection was an absolutely dismal piece of BASIC tripe, barely good enough to be printed as a type-in listing in one of the early magazines. Many of the c.s.s. crew had owned it, however, due to a well-meaning Mum or Grandma thinking it would be a brilliant Christmas or birthday present for little Johnny, so it came up often in discussions, mostly so that people could spit bile about how bloody rancid it was.


cascade
CASSETTE
50
PLUS
SPECIAL FREE WATCH OFFER...
50 COMPUTER GAMES ON ONE CASSETTE
YOURS FOR £9.95
including FREE Watch and Postage
FREE
20 KEY, MULTIFUNCTION CALCULATOR WATCH
with every order for a Cassette 50
Normal 12 and 24 hour time mode
Calendar mode
Alarm mode
Calculator mode
WORTH OVER £10
CASSETTE 50 IS AVAILABLE ON
BBC A/B ATARI DRAGON ELECTRON
VIC 20 ORIC-1 ZX81 apple Atmos
Spectrum commodore 64 AMSTRAD
FREE calculator watch with every Cassette 50
EXPRESS DELIVERY-ORDER NOW!
ONLY £9.95
Spectrum 16k/48k or +

"Incredibly frustrating!" - that's the verdict on Cassette-50's FROGGER. Satisfied users tell us it's one of the most challenging you'll find - it's almost as good as the arcade version! CARGO has you trying desperately to complete your helicopter mission under attack. Plus 48 other tactical, logical and adventure games featuring multi-coloured and user-defined graphics, scrolling and full use of the Spectrum sound capabilities.

1. Muncher
2. Ski Jump
3. Basketball
4. Frogger
5. Breakout
6. Crusher
7. Startrek
8. Martian Knockout
9. Boggles
10. Alien Attack
11. Lunar Landing
12. Maze Eater
13. Microtrap
14. Motorway
15. Labyrinth
16. Skittles
17. Race Track
18. Ski Run
19. Tanks
20. Solar Ship
21. Ten Pins
22. Cars
23. Stomper
24. Pinball
25. Cavern
26. Laser
27. Alien
28. Cargo
29. The Race
30. The Skull
31. Orbit
32. Munch
33. Bowls
34. Raiders
35. Field
36. Draggold
37. Space Search
38. Inferno
39. Nim
40. Voyager
41. Sketch Pad
42. Blitz
43. Fishing Mission
44. Mystical Diamonds
45. Galaxy Defence
46. Cypher
47. Jetmobile
48. Barrel Jump
49. Attacker
50. Space Mission

Names and games may vary for each type of computer.

Postage FREE in U.K. Add £1.00 for overseas orders. Free watch and tape will be despatched within 28 days.

I enclose a cheque/postal order for £ ______ made payable to Cascade Games Ltd.

or through any Post Office by TRANSCASH (Giro No. [illegible])
For even faster ordering when charging to Access, Barclaycard and Trustcard Visa use our 24 hour service. (0423) 504663.

No. ______

Name ______
Address ______
Post Code ______
Country ______ YS/4/86

COMMODORE 64 ☐ ATARI ☐ ORIC 1 ☐ BBC A/B ☐
SPECTRUM ☐ VIC 20 ☐ ZX 81 ☐ APPLE ☐
AMSTRAD ☐ ATMOS ☐ DRAGON ☐ ELECTRON ☐

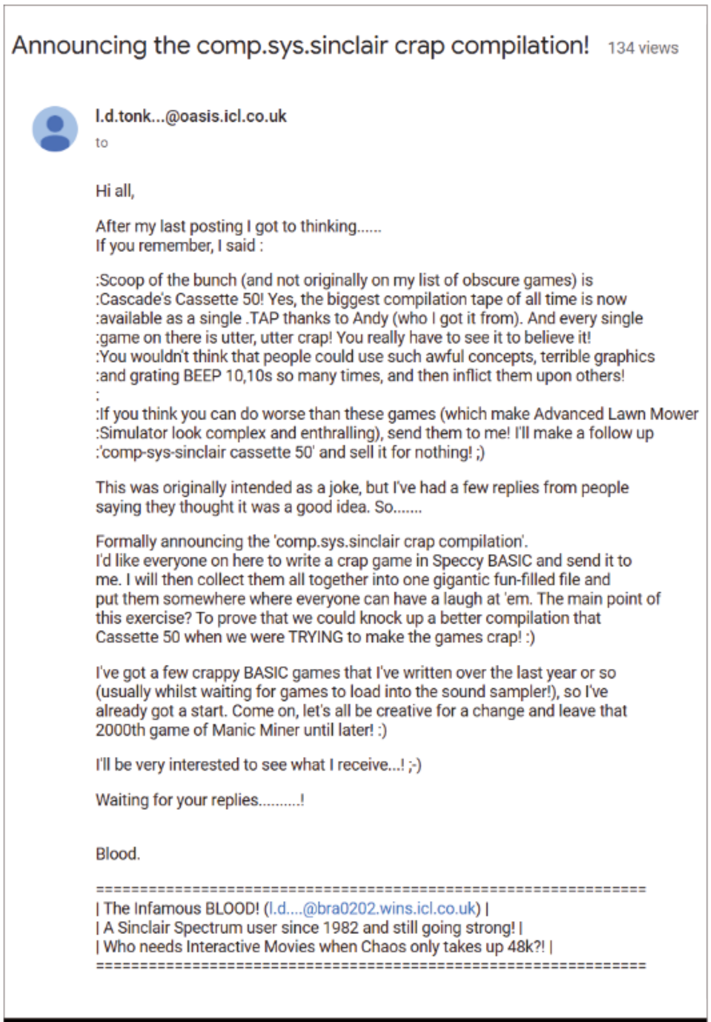
Cascade Games Ltd., 1-3 Haywra Crescent,
Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG1 5BG, England.
Telephone: (0423) 504663. *Registered Number [illegible]*

The very impressive ad for Cassette 50

And yet, it was MIA. We had snapshots of some of the games from it, but not the full caboodle - funnily enough it seemed that most people who owned it had worn the watch and thrown the tapes in the bin for some reason *cough*. But then, in late January 1996, a heroic(?) chap by the name of Andy took the time to make a TAP file of the entire thing and uploaded it to NVG. I announced this to comp.sys.sinclair on January 25th, having finally experienced its utter crapness for myself (I was not a Cassette 50 owner back in the day, luckily), along with a jokey note that if anyone thought they could write a *worse* game they should send it to me and I'd 'do a comp.sys. sinclair Cassette 50 and sell it for nothing'.

And then a weird thing happened. I started to get emails (yes, emails - in the 90s you could just publish your email address on the Internet and it was *fine*, man) from people asking questions about what sort of game they could submit and in what format I wanted it. And I realised that maybe there was genuine mileage in my throw-away suggestion - we could actually make something fun!

So the next day I announced the inaugural (although at the time I thought it'd be a one-off) comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Compilation (yes, 'Compilation', it wasn't 'Competition' until a number of years later) to the assembled Usenet posse. There had been crap games before (Rich Pelley's infamous 'Crap Game Corner' in Your Sinclair, for example), but the aim of this one was specifically to prove that we could make better games than the ones on Cassette 50 when we were *trying* to make them crap.



Announcing the comp.sys.sinclair crap compilation!

l.d.tonk...@oasis.icl.co.uk

Hi all,

After my last posting I got to thinking......
If you remember, I said :

:Scoop of the bunch (and not originally on my list of obscure games) is
:Cascade's Cassette 50! Yes, the biggest compilation tape of all time is now
:available as a single .TAP thanks to Andy (who I got it from). And every single
:game on there is utter, utter crap! You really have to see it to believe it!
:You wouldn't think that people could use such awful concepts, terrible graphics
:and grating BEEP 10,10s so many times, and then inflict them upon others!
:
:If you think you can do worse than these games (which make Advanced Lawn Mower
:Simulator look complex and enthralling), send them to me! I'll make a follow up
:'comp-sys-sinclair cassette 50' and sell it for nothing! ;)

This was originally intended as a joke, but I've had a few replies from people saying they thought it was a good idea. So.......

Formally announcing the 'comp.sys.sinclair crap compilation'.
I'd like everyone on here to write a crap game in Speccy BASIC and send it to me. I will then collect them all together into one gigantic fun-filled file and put them somewhere where everyone can have a laugh at 'em. The main point of this exercise? To prove that we could knock up a better compilation that Cassette 50 when we were TRYING to make the games crap! :)

I've got a few crappy BASIC games that I've written over the last year or so (usually whilst waiting for games to load into the sound sampler!), so I've already got a start. Come on, let's all be creative for a change and leave that 2000th game of Manic Miner until later! :)

I'll be very interested to see what I receive...! ;-)

Waiting for your replies.........!

Blood.

===
| The Infamous BLOOD! (l.d....@bra0202.wins.icl.co.uk) |
| A Sinclair Spectrum user since 1982 and still going strong! |
| Who needs Interactive Movies when Chaos only takes up 48k?! |
===

Blood's 1996 post announcing the Crap Games Compilation

The rules were simple: BASIC only, your own creations only, keep it simple, get them in fast. I'd set a lofty goal of getting 50 games, the same number as Cascade had managed, within a few short weeks. That turned out to be a little on the optimistic side - 'a few short weeks' wasn't long enough, and I had to extend the deadline a number of times because we were all a bit lazier than we thought we were and/or had proper jobs to do as well. And hey, even when you're trying to be crap it still takes thought and effort.

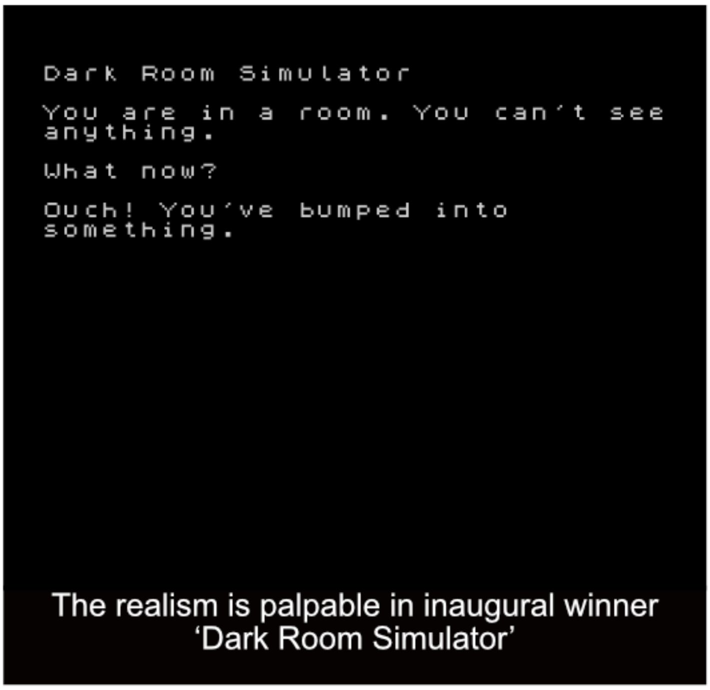
But by the end of March, not only had we managed to assemble 50 crap games, we'd actually beaten the target and produced 60 of the evil little buggers. And they were truly awful, but also, to my absolute delight, incredibly amusing - it transpired that if you were *trying* to be crap, you actually put a lot more thought and effort into making your game *funny*. And it was fabulous! Everything was slow, there were terrible, long-winded beeper tunes that you couldn't skip, wonky UDGs, collision detection that was 'mostly optional', but best of all there were some brilliantly awful ideas - a national lottery simulator, a game in stereoscopic 3D (kinda), a text adventure version of Tetris. It was better than I could ever have hoped!

scroll? ->

I excitedly put together a lengthy manual with overblown descriptions of all the games, some provided by the authors themselves, others written by me, and released it to the Internet with the usual fanfare and razzamatazz on March 25th 1996. Everyone loved it, and I got a lot of feedback via Usenet and email (alas, now mostly lost, it seems) to say how much fun people had had going through the games! The one thing hardly *anyone* agreed with, however, were my picks for 'winners'.

When compiling the manual I'd chosen five games as 'the worst', awarding the grand prize to Alan Moore's truly execrable "Anthea Turner's National Lottery Simulator", but everyone else had their own favourites (looking back, I don't even agree with my own picks now) so there was only one thing to do - a public vote. And so, a couple of days after release, the 'compilation' finally became a 'competition'.

Amusingly, the vote took as long to pull together as the collection itself - I'd allowed everyone to pick their own top five and planned to collate the results, but once again it was all a bit 'herding cats' and it wasn't until the 21st of May that we finally had the agreed winners, with the ultimate prize going to Iain Scrimgeour's 'Dark Room Simulator', a terrifying experiment in sensory deprivation.



```
Dark Room Simulator

You are in a room. You can't see
anything.

What now?

Ouch! You've bumped into
something.
```

The realism is palpable in inaugural winner 'Dark Room Simulator'

And so, the competition drew to an end. We all forgot about Cassette 50 now that we'd found it, and moved on to trying to find the other MIAs, reminiscing about the olden days, and shouting at people for posting binary files on a newsgroup which didn't allow binaries. But the crap wasn't done with us yet - it had been fun, and the people demanded more! So the following year we did the whole thing again, and once again it was a huge success, delivering another massive 51 entries.

By 1998, however, I'd changed jobs and had a lot less free time, so I didn't think I'd have a chance to do it all again, but this was where something magical happened - the compo took on a life of its own. comp.sys.sinclair regular Barry Salter took the reins for '98 and delivered another brilliant collection. Alistair Nelson and Graham Goring picked up the baton for '99, and so on and so on - another year, another competition, someone else stepping in each time to ensure the crap tap never ran dry. Eventually the rules evolved to allow a whole year for entries, and to ensure the compo's survival by awarding the hosting of next year's compilation to the person who accidentally produced the least crap game - a truly malevolent twist of genius that still makes me giggle.

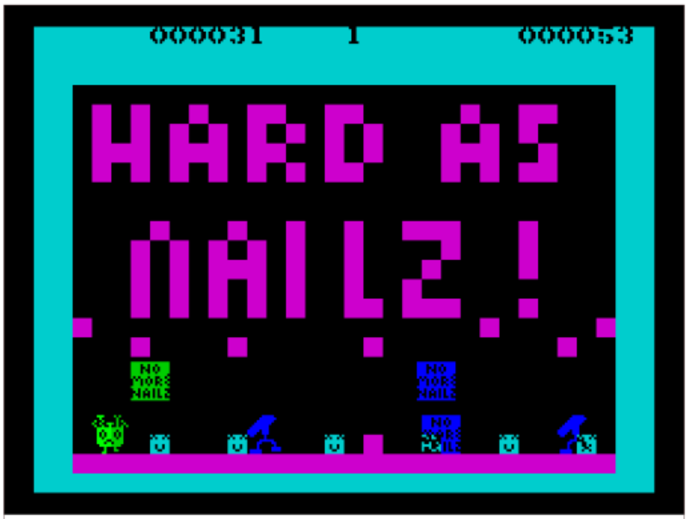
Spin the wheels of time and here we are 30 years later. The Crap Games Competition is now older than I was when I created it, still bears the comp.sys.sinclair name (although most people these days will have no idea what that even means, let alone actually be able to access Usenet) and, amazingly, is still going as strong as ever. Over the years it's been the subject of reports in The Guardian and on the BBC, it's mentioned on Wikipedia's Cassette 50 page, and has inspired similar competitions for other platforms. I'm no longer steering the ship, but I do keep up with it every year (and have even entered occasionally) and I am so, so proud of what the community has achieved with something that started as a throw-away joke.

And that, I think, is the reason for the competition's longevity and success: the Speccy community. Whilst the wider retro scene has often descended into in-fighting and rivalry over the years, I truly believe that there is something special about ZX Spectrum fans - they're dedicated, they're distinctly European, and most of all they're happy to be a bit crap (in a funky skillo sort of way). The Spectrum was the little machine that included *everyone*, and the comp.sys.sinclair Crap Games Competition is also precisely that - a programming competition with the lowest barrier to entry possible, where you can win by just having a funny idea rather rather than needing to be the best of the best.

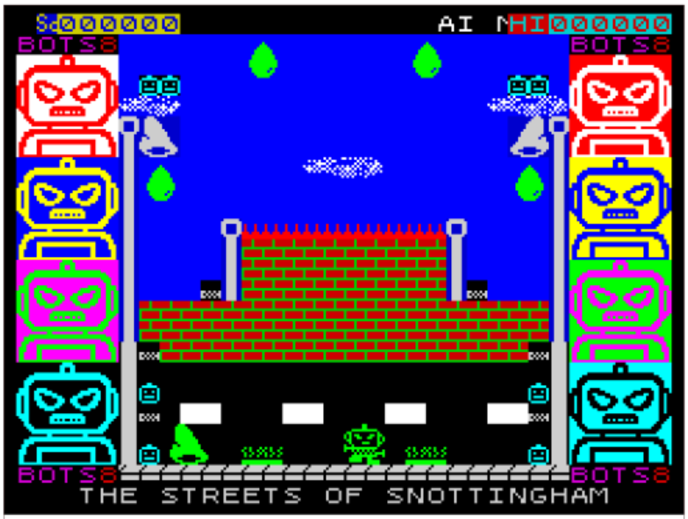
So a round of applause, please, to creators, the hosts, the consumers, and most of all to the competition that will probably outlast us all. Some people might be upset that their longest-lasting and most famous idea turned out to be an annual collection of really bad games, but not me - I love it! Happy 30th birthday, CSSCGC, here's to the next thirty!

BreakSpace : Heroes of Crap

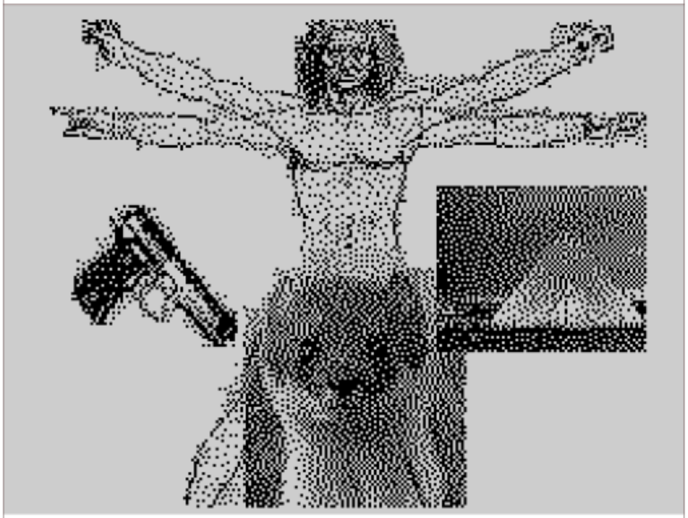
Anyone can enter the CSSCGC : even the massively incompetent.
Several of the BreakSpace team have entered, and even hosted, over the years.
Let's examine their shame.



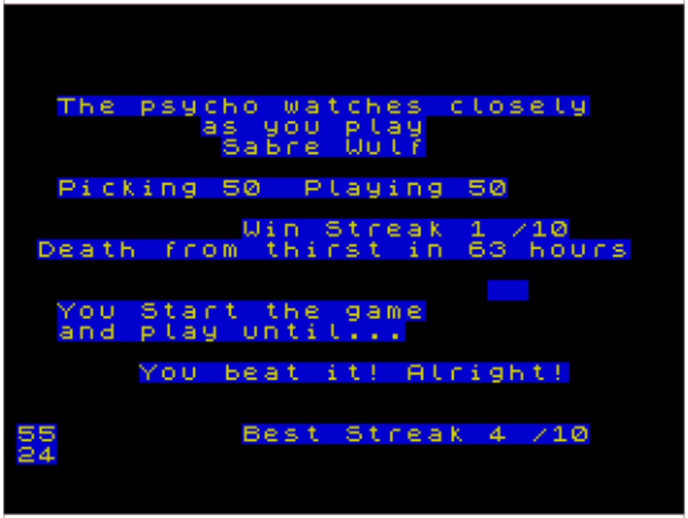
Sloany coughed up Hard as Nailz in 2021, showing some of the promise that would eventually build up to Bubbleback



Sloany came back in 2023 with A.I. Made Me Do It, a terribly difficult platformer where you will get killed by invisible snot.

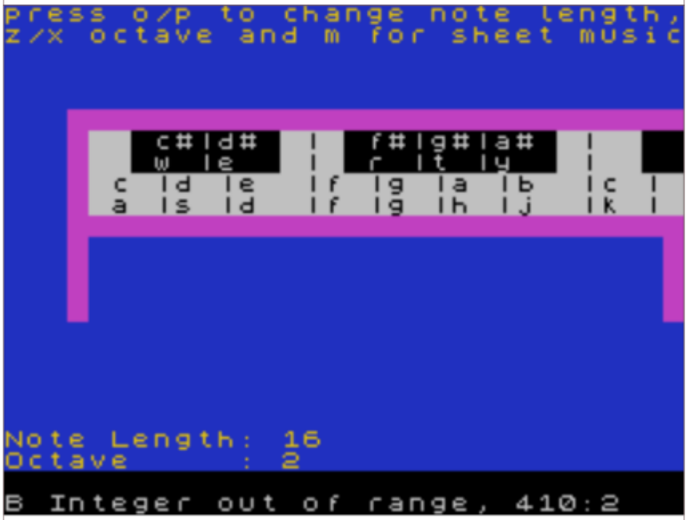


Mpk caught the fever in 2023, producing Trouble From The Past, a thrilling adventure sequel to a book he'd never read…



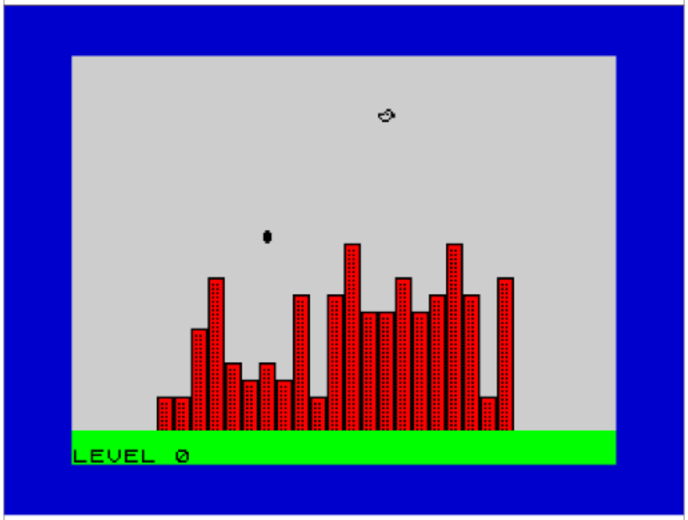
```
The psycho watches closely
      as you play
      Sabre Wulf

Picking 50    Playing 50

          Win Streak 1 /10
Death from thirst in 63 hours

You Start the game
and play until...

    You beat it! Alright!

55
24        Best Streak 4 /10
```

…and the longest title in the competition that year, the pointless Professional A Psychotic Madman Kidnaps You And Will Only Release You When You Complete A ZX Spectrum Game Ten Times, Back To Back Simulator



```
press o/p to change note length,
z/x octave and m for sheet music

   c#|d#    |   f#|g#|a#    |
   w |e     |   r |t |y     |
 c  |d  |e  |f  |g  |a  |b  |c  |
 a  |s  |d  |f  |g  |h  |j  |k  |

Note Length: 16
Octave     : 2
B Integer out of range, 410:2
```

Jamie's a contest regular, with vast piles of crap laying in his wake. For example, 2013's Advanced Piano Simulator



Dave was even *that guy*, releasing Advanced Kittiwake Simulator on Dec 31 '25, bringing us right up to date with the state of the crap art.

King Kong Part 1 : El Muro

JuanFran

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44459

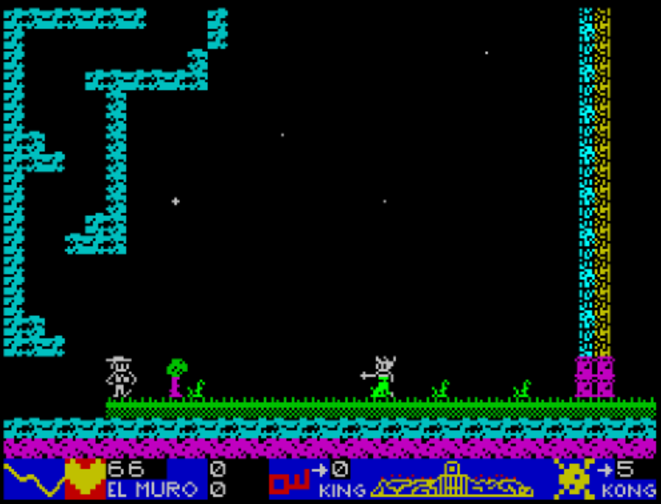
PWYW / £2

Every game must have a theme, a stylistic hatstand on which to hang and in this case the hatstand of choice is the King Kong story of a giant building-climbing monkey and his love for a tiny wee woman in a flimsy chiffon dress. Yes, it's our favourite giant monkey movie, expressed through the medium of 16 coloured ZX pixels.

This Spanish Kong flavoured platformer, a sort of Jet Set Guillermo if you will, takes place on Kong Island. In this first part of the proposed trilogy, El Muro or The Wall, the player takes the role of hero Jack Driscoll, who must try to rescue the damsel in distress Ann Darrow. She has been carried off screaming, a lot, by the Skull Island peeps in order to sacrifice her to Kong, who of course lives on the other side of the honking big wall that keeps him out.

In the process you have to recover 6 pieces of a totem and take them all to where Ann has been trapped. Then you cross the lava flow that separates you from King Kong and your beloved. Oh and you must also find the key to be able to get past that huge impregnable wall. So, easy peasy.

Except it's not. As platformers go it's quite challenging, and the amount of contortions you have to go through to get through the rooms is considerable. The map is very large, JSW style large, and the level you have to raise your game to in



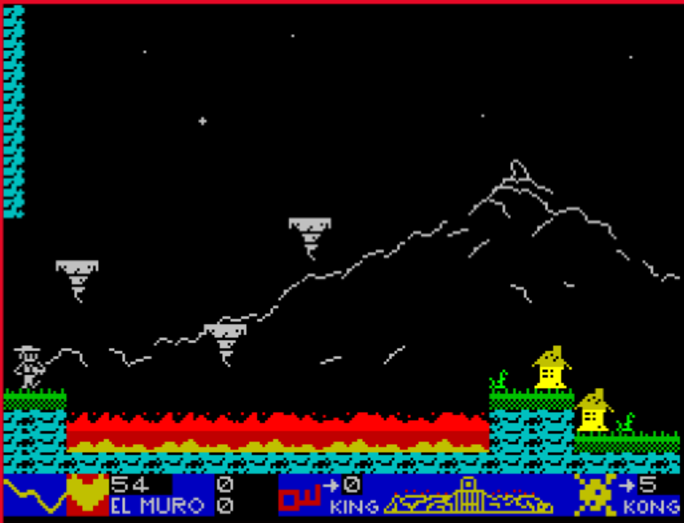
The Muro in question

your running, jumping, ducking and swerving is quite high. The controls are nice, QAOP, so you have a bit of control where you jump and land, steering yourself in mid air, which is a dynamic I've always liked.

The graphics are nice, nothing ground breaking or cool, a real retro flavour to the characters and animation. Nothing wrong with that, I feel they could have been given a bit more love. But that said, you REALLY don't have a lot of time to examine them as it's all go and don't die. I'd also like an English translation of the texts, but hey it doesn't affect your enjoyment of the game.

Now this is a trilogy covering the entire story, so Kong doesn't show up in this one, but you know he's coming soon. I'm guessing the next part is all Kong versus dinosaurs and part three is New York where it turns into a version of Rampage or King of the Monsters. I dunno, I shall have to check. I'll look out for news of the second and third installments to see how they handle the depiction of the giant monkey. I love a giant monkey, me.

ALL STAFF :
Please note the new mandatory training item 'Differentiating between Apes and Monkeys', to be completed immediately, alongside the 'Love Letters : Avoidance Tips' item.
Thank you for your cooperation.



Public transport on Skull Island is problematic

We don't need no great ape nation.
We don't need no air control.
Don't rescue Darrow, it's her own fault.
Hey, Driscoll : Leave that ape alone.

There's a reason why they
have the big bloody wall.

King Kong : The Wall, you see. It's a Pink Floyd joke.
I'll get my coat.

But not before I mention a few points about the game in question, of course. The ZXGM logo on the title screen says a lot - you know exactly what you're getting here, with the regular mechanical features of that prolific engine delivering solid platforming action. Just make sure to run this on a 128k machine, as there's some adventurous and atmospheric music that will keep you company as you bounce about.

And bounce about you will, and quite happily, against the nicely detailed backdrops of the island setting. Not since the XBox 360 King Kong game* has an adaptation stayed so close to the inspiration, which is nice to see. Too many Kong games feature barrels tumbling down scaffolding for my liking, a trope that doesn't feature in any of the movies.

Given that the engine is familiar, the features that differentiate games from other technical stable-mates are the visuals, the level design, the difficulty. And JuanFran's done an admirable job on those fronts. The difficulty in particular is well balanced with just enough health pickups in each section to allow for the occasional mis-step, and the energy-based system even in places allows the player to tactically skip a tricky bit and just run through the flames.

It's not super long, but that's no bad thing. Just make sure to finish it before part two comes out. After all - How can you have your pudding if you don't eat your meat?

Exeunt, with air guitar.

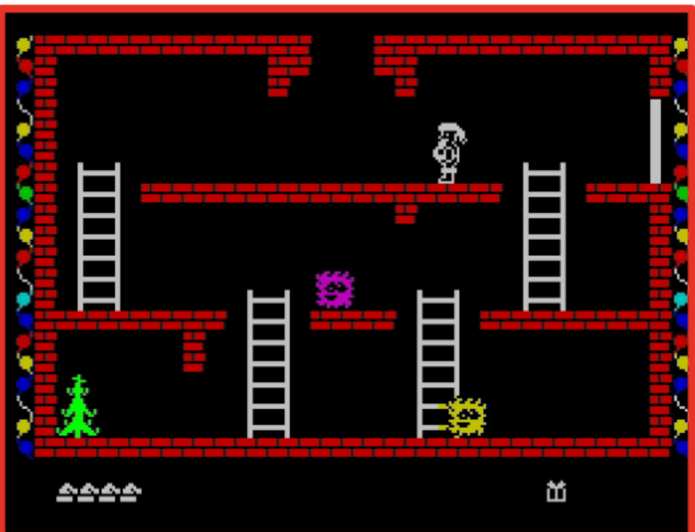
**Which was 20 whole years ago, Momento Mori fans!*

Santa's Lost and Found

Indigo Beetle

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45131

PWYW / $1



Not a creature was stirring, except those weird things

Invoke your best Noddy Holder and scream with me – IT'S CHRISTMASSSSSS!

And what says Christmas more than a new, festive ZX Spectrum puzzle-platformer? Santa's Lost & Found is a quaint, charming, and lovingly crafted dose of seasonal Speccy goodness that drips with the spirit of the season, even if it's as light as a dusting of snow.

Let's face it, we're suckers for a Christmas Spectrum game. For many of us, the Speccy was Christmas – the thrill of a new cassette, the loading screen hope, the sheer magic of it all. Intense nostalgia, ACTIVATED. The Spectrum has its share of Yuletide classics, too. The Snowman is enjoyable, but my personal favourite is Monty Mole's Christmas Capers – one of the few I ever completed fair and square!

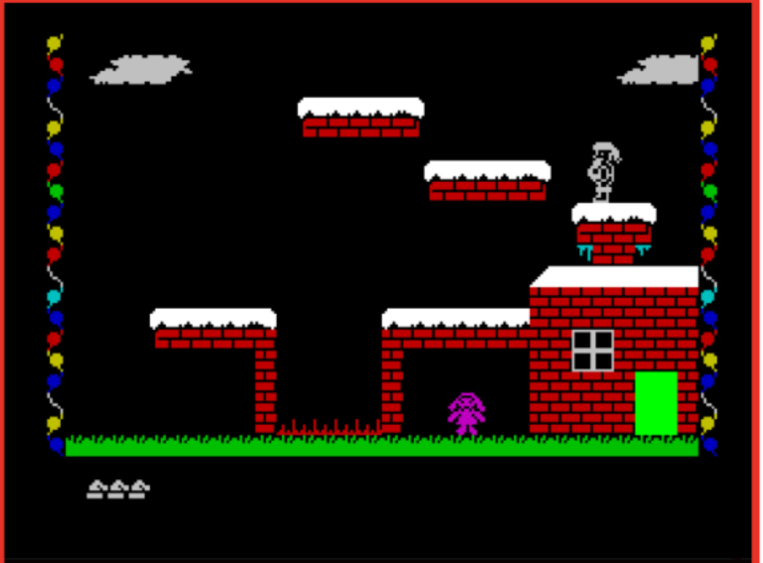
Santa's Lost & Found is a sterling effort that captures that innocent, festive vibe. The concept is a cracker: a two-phase mission per house. First, you're on the roof, matching the correct present to the correct child's chimney. Then, you descend into the house itself, dodging a couple of festive foes (What are they? I can't tell) to place the gift under the tree and make your escape.

It's a great, logical idea for a game… but it also feels like a bit of a missed opportunity. The primary issue is the lack of variety and challenge. Every house has the same internal layout, which quickly turns the exploration phase into a routine. The challenge is minimal. If you move with purpose, you can often zip in and out before the enemies even become a threat.

Outside on the rooftops, it's even easier. A few spike traps dot the landscape, but they're more decorative than dangerous. You won't find yourself sweating over precision jumps or tight timings here.

HOWEVER – and this is a big however – the game shines like a bauble on a pine tree with bags and bags of pure, unfiltered Christmas spirit. Even the colour clash seems like a festive feature – its a game that screams "Speccy Christmas!" It's a jaunty, easy-going romp that smacks of family fun and developer passion.

This isn't a game to critique for hardcore challenge. This is a game to dust off the real hardware, hook it up to the big TV in the front room, and fire up on Christmas Eve. Let the kids (or grandkids) have a go. Marvel at the simple joy of delivering presents. Soak in the nostalgia. Santa's Lost & Found is less of a gaming feast and more of a perfect Christmas stocking filler. It's short, sweet, undemanding, and wrapped with so much charm and festive cheer that it's impossible to dislike. A lovely, heartfelt little gift for the Spectrum community. Now, where's my selection box?



Santa slips down the flue of an unsuspecting child.

Nostagia's all very well, but this game is also a forward-looking title, as the *second* game released using the new Kwyll IDE, about which we have more this issue. It's a promising start, too, with the large colourful sprites moving about smoothly, and creative transitions down the chimneys working very well. The engine seems flexible, and that bodes well for future titles.

But we're not looking at Kwyll here, we're looking at Santa's Lost and Found. The initial setup, with presents scattered all around the gardens of a housing estate, doesn't reflect at all well on the operational procedures of Mr. Claus. Presents falling off the sleigh? Unacceptable. . A bicycle falling from a sled at those speeds could have killed someone. Surely, the Coke-addled spirit needs to have a stern word with his elves once he gets back to the North Pole.

But first he has to get those presents collected and delivered. Fortunately for him, this is not a difficult game, or an especially large one. It's a nice kid-friendly platfomer with a minimal puzzle element. It could barely be simpler, although there's a certain satisfaction in figuring out the optimum route, which may add replay value. Then again, maybe I'm overthinking things.

The pace is slow, the threats are clear and easily avoided and all but one of the jumps are easy enough that you should never fall foul. Perfect for a post-Christmas-dinner-and-Mimosa afternoon. You'll be able to complete it in a couple of attempts - if you can't, maybe that's a sign to lay off the mimosas for a bit. Have a nap.

It looks the part, with the snow-covered rooftops and chimneys setting an instant Christmas-card tone, and the complete lack of sound invoking, uh, Silent Night. Bit of a stretch, there, but I'm being nice. It's Christmas, after all.

An ideal retro holiday chill-out game that showcases an exciting new Speccy development tool. What more could you want? Beats a lump of coal.

CPC
CORP
CPC

S1ncla1r C1ty

Javier Fopiani & Furillo Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44627

€2.50

R3plac1ng l3tt3rs w1th numb3rs is c00l. Cyberpunk is cool. Sir Clive Sinclair is cool. So when I clocked S1NCLA1R C1TY, a "a ZX Spectrum cyberpunk video adventure game" from Furillo Productions, my immediate thought was "Cool!".

Beginning with a stylish intro and some kick ass music, S1NCLA1R C1TY sees you take on the role of Zeta, a renegade who remembers the better times before the malevolent CPC corporation destroyed what was once a thriving metropolis. Your mission is to hook up with the pockets of resistance and take back the C1TY.

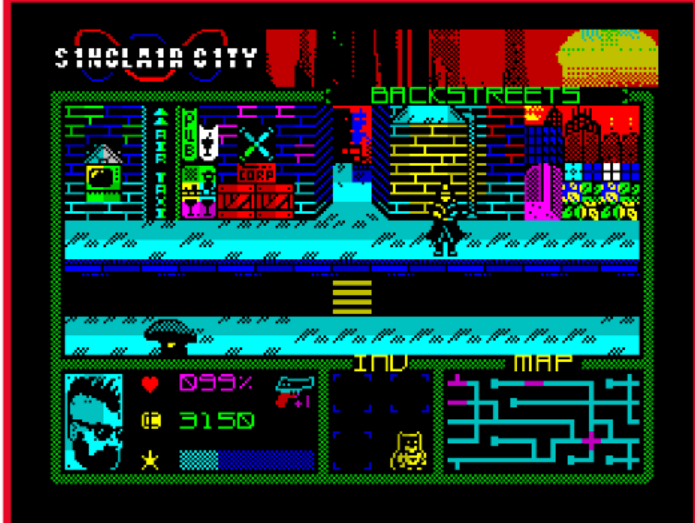
There's a real 80s vision of the future to proceedings, think the likes of Blade Runner and Running Man and you're on the right track. In fact what I love about this game is that there's a real sense that you are in a fully formed universe. As you mooch around the beautifully atmospheric C1TY there are a variety of places to visit such as bars, shops, and even a church. During the course of your mooching there are plenty of characters to interact with too, including some shady "dealers" in the side streets and some very familiar faces in the buildings. The overall aim of the game is to progress your quest through the exchange of items and information with the C1TY's colourful characters.

I'm not a huge adventure head so I'm appreciative that S1NCLA1R C1TY does a great job of breaking up proceedings by serving up a variety of genres to keep you entertained and on your toes. The shooting ambushes are great fun and there are even some driving sections between chapters, where cars seem to have a real magnetic pull to your C5.

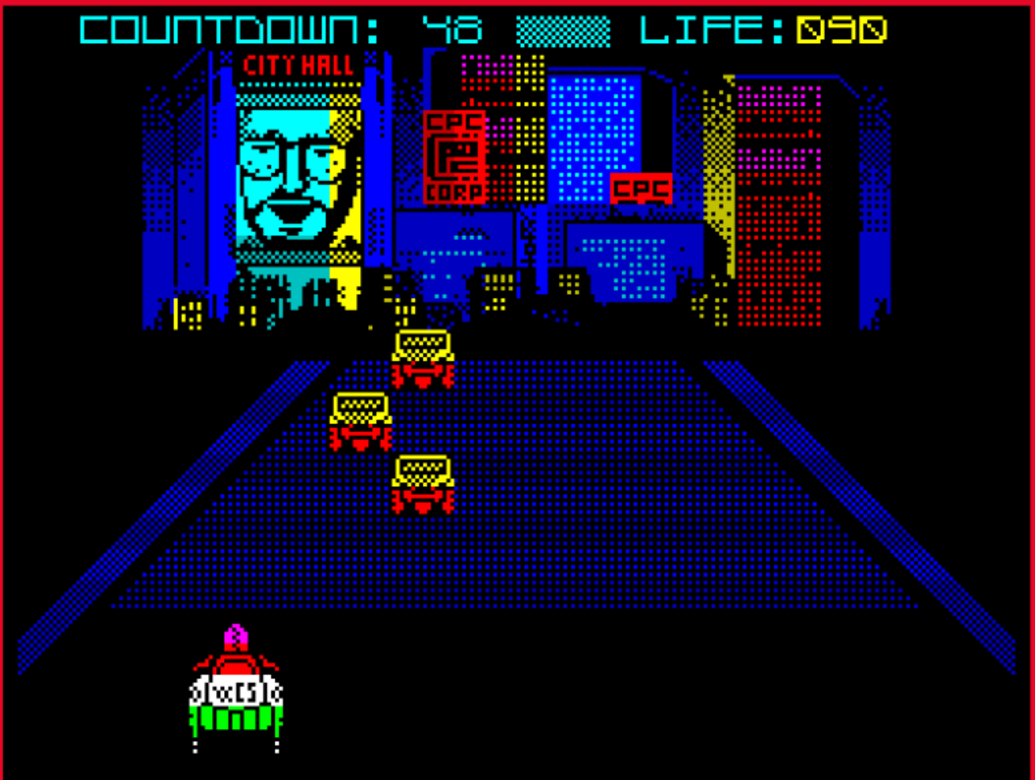
You can while away manys an hour finding your way around the C1TY and much like I did playing the likes of Death Wish 3 and Turbo Esprit, I spent more time just roaming about exploring than I did focusing on the mission at hand. I have to admit I did find the acid rain (and later toxic fumes) really annoying, but it's part and parcel of the game, much like the spider in Atari's Centipede or an injured star player in Football Manager.

A fun subgame for eagle-eyed Spec-Chums to play is spot the reference, of which there are plenty, and not just from classic games either as there are some cameos from the odd modern homebrew hero too. This game has more nods and winks than a Carry-On film. It's a huge game too, with three large chapters to explore and plenty of surprises to find.

If you're in the market for some genre-splicing retro-future shenanigans, then I can heartily recommend that you book your ticket to S1NCLA1R C1TY, where the colours are vibrant and the SCREEN$ are pretty.



Backstreet's back, alright!

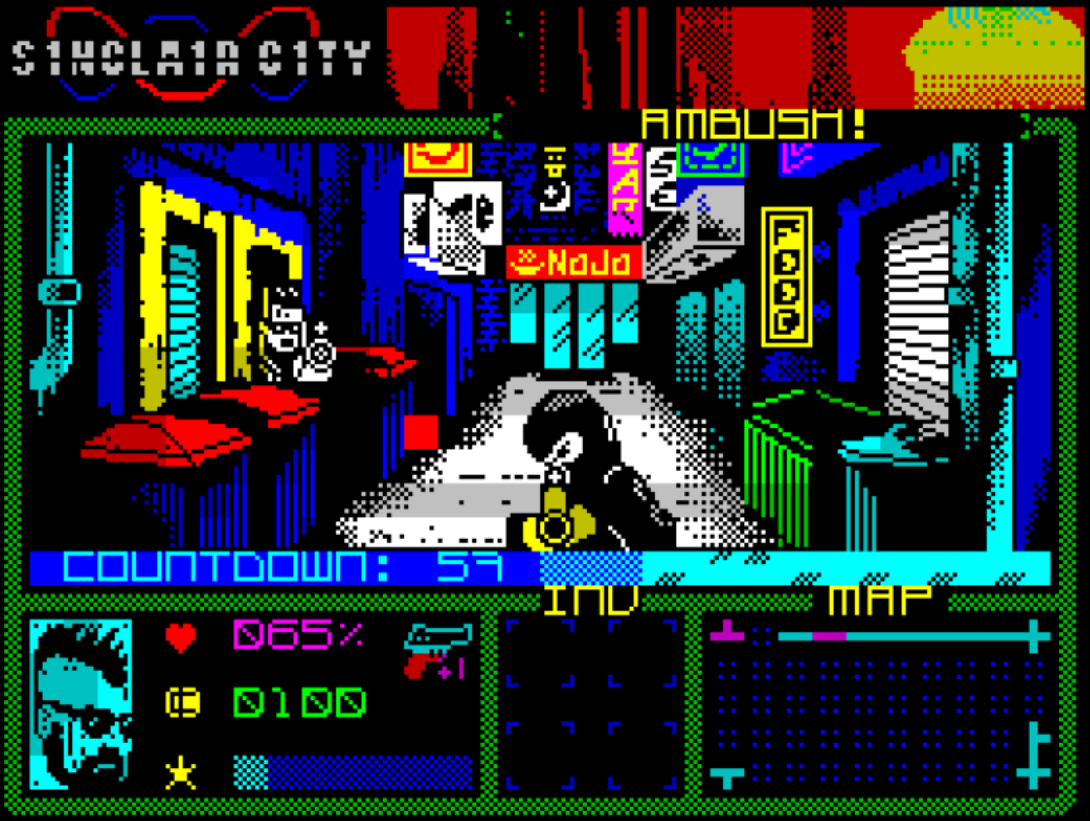


I like driving in my car. It's not *quite* a Jaguar.

The first thing that hits you with this game is the title. Now I'm too old for skinny jeans, so I'm definitely too long in the tooth to be using ones instead of 'i's. So, the second thing that hits you about *Sinclair City* is that it's a game worthy of 128K of memory. There's clearly a lot of work gone into this by Javier Fopiani & Furillo Productions, a dreamteam of two Speccy powerhouses in their own right. This is a fleshed-out 8bit dystopia.

As always with arcade adventures, there's a balance between action and adventure. You can't have too little jeopardy in my opinion, but you can definitely have too much, and there's always a temptation for developers to lean towards the latter. Sinclair City gets it mostly right, especially as it offers an easy version. The mafia ambushes are enjoyable battles, and are as close to the stress of a real shootout as I ever want to get. Like Sloany, I could do without the acid rain (whatever did happen to that I wonder?). It just got in the way of what this game is all about—exploring.

This epic adventure is worth checking out on many levels. There are abundant easter eggs for the fairweather player, and some meaty problem solving for the adventurer. You'll get to meet some ZX heroes along the way, and give the nasty CPC Corporation a bloody nose. Get to it, S1NCLA1R C1TY needs you.



How Rude!

Ah, Cyberpunk. There you were in the 90s, moments before the internet went mainstream, warning us about how technology would create a miserable dystopia where a handful of giant corporations would rule over the economy while the misinformed populace grew ever poorer. And then everyone decided that was a great idea and just went ahead with it.

The deeply irritatingly named S1ncla1r C1ty takes a Speccy-themed run at the whole Blade Runner thing without taking itself too seriously. It's one of the best-looking games you'll see on the platform, with, as mentioned by m'colleagues, stacks of in-jokes, character references and general detail to the environments. The overlay of the absurd Speccy pantheon on the grimy and violent cityscapes works better than you might expect it to.

The gameplay, however, lets the side down a bit. There are basically 3 modes. The main mode exploring the city on foot, is where you'll spend most of your time. While this is atmospheric and assisted by a lovely map, it grows repetitive. The intermittent acid rain acts as a randomised drain on your health that you can't really do anything about. The second, most fun mode, covers the intermittent shooting-gallery ambushes, and the 3rd mode, the C5 driving sections, is the least satisfying. Your enjoyment will depend on how much you enjoy sight-seeing, because the sights are certainly something to behold.

Despite the repetition, I found it a worthwhile journey, freeing the city from tyranny. All together now : We built this city. We built this city on POKE & LOAD.

0Score

Paco Vespa

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44641

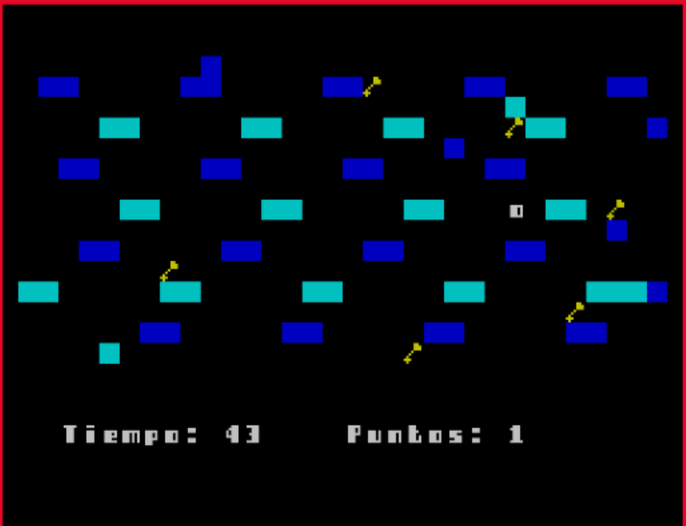
Free

Another Spanish game to review. ¡Parece que este número tiene como objetivo que yo domine el Español! Gracias al editor jefe Mpk por esto. (De nada - Ed) Right, better get back to English before I lose you all.

We've got one of the multiple entries into this year's bytemaniacos.com BASIC Programming Competitions, and whilst similar listings and games exist, this one encourages the player to end on zero points. Points aren't always good anyway, as video games suggest: ask anyone in the UK with a driving ban about this.

Ending with zero points, that seems easy, right? Well, though it's not a difficult game, there is some skill involved. Hit blue blocks, and your score will decrease, and nudging a cyan block will increase it. And the main character (an emboldened O) is constantly moving up and down the screen, with blocks forcing a change of direction as if there's some bounce in each block, though the energy never dissipates. Using the O and P keys directs our little object left and right (movements are therefore diagonal); in this way, you may guide to collect all keys on screen.

Each level is completed when an on-screen timer reaches zero, and then you are evaluated:



I've got the key, I've got the secret!

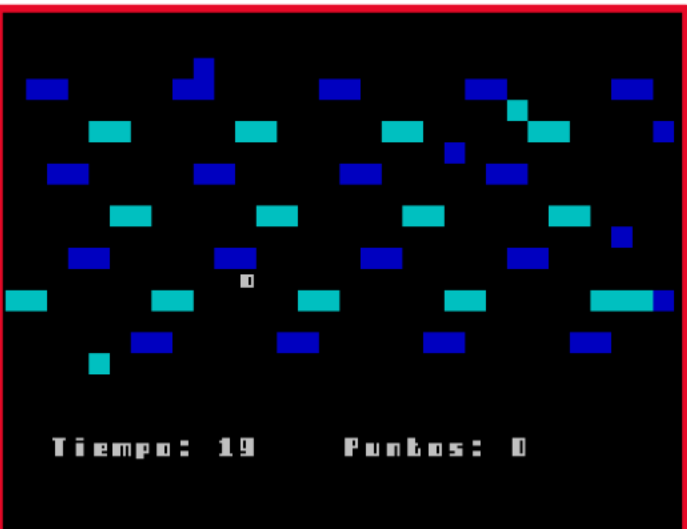
Firstly, is your score also zero? And have you collected all of the keys on screen? If the answer to this is yes, the game continues to a new level.

This game is fairly sedate; yes, we can, with modern day technologies, increase the speed to make it more challenging, newer revisions of the OMNI 128 allow you to switch between 3.5 and 7Mhz - but I prefer for this sort of thing to stick to what Sinclair gave us, and there are no real surprises here: fairly slow with a gentle learning curve. One that has surprisingly kept me going during my tea break.

PacoVespa is a genius.

Think about it : most Spec-Chums these days have their colossal libraries of games neatly organised into folders on their DivMMCs, their Nexts or their The Spectrums etc. These folders tend to be organised in a variety of ways, but one popular way is the year of release. Now, if we have proved anything in the 12 months that Break Space has been in existence, it's that 2025 has been an absolute vintage year for ZX Spectrum releases. That being the case, when folk pull up their 2025 folder for a quick blast at this momentous year, which game will be sitting proudly at the top of the tree alphanumerically? That's right! Good old 0Score.

So what can we expect from 0Score when we fire it up? Well there's an instruction page in Spanish, which is only fair as it is a Spanish game after all! However, even those as linguistically challenged as myself should be able to grasp that O & P are left and right respectively, Q to quit & space to start.



19 seconds…stay on target!

Once you're into the game proper, you must guide your constantly moving titular 0 around the board, collecting keys and gaining a point when you hit a blue square and losing a point when you hit a cyan square, with the ultimate aim of finishing on exactly 0 points. Once you complete a screen, it's on to the next level and so it goes, rinse and repeat.

Overall 0Score is a fun little diversion and something to whet the appetite of Speccy gamers looking to plough into the delights of the Speccy scene circa 2025.

Flappy Saga

Spectral Wings

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45007

Free

Flappy Saga is a Flappy Bird clone for the Spectrum. It is brutally, punishingly hard. I struggled to get past the first three screens. In the end, I had to drop the emulator speed down to 60% just to make any real progress. Even at that slower speed, the game was harder than an eagle on PCP*.

A huge part of the difficulty comes from the ultrasensitive controls. Woe betide you if you die and leave your finger on the flap button a millisecond too long. The game will instantly restart and send you soaring directly into a pipe for an immediate second death.

There are things to love here. The graphics are nice, and the flapping animation is well done. You can collect extra lives and coins, which makes the game more interesting and, in its own way, more challenging. But the placement of some of these items is so ridiculous that trying to collect them feels like embarking on a suicide mission.

The game, of course, doesn't scroll. So you are left guessing what obstacles you'll have to react to in bullet time as you complete one screen and jump to the next. Although, I will say the level design on each individual screen doesn't punish you unfairly once you can see it.

"Saga," to me, suggests an epic story or adventure. But the only saga here was the repetition of dying over and over again while trying to make the tiny amount of progress necessary to complete this review.

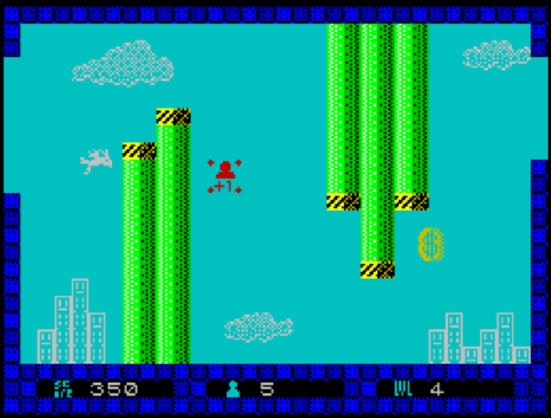
Perhaps later levels unfold into more variety than the same old green pipes, to become a Beowulf** for pigeons. But I'll never know. I lasted as long as a canary in a cyanide mine.

*PCP (Phencyclidine, or "angel dust") is a powerful dissociative drug, peaking in notoriety in the 80s. Its effects include numbness, aggression, and superhuman strength – So an eagle on PCP would be very hard indeed.

Beowulf is the epic Old English poem that tells the story of its titular hero, a Geatish warrior who travels to Denmark to defeat the monster Grendel and later becomes a king. While it shares some similarities with the Saga* format, its actually not one.

Saga: A prose narrative (written in prose, not verse) from medieval Iceland or Norway, chronicling the lives and families of legendary or historical heroes over generations. Sagas are often sprawling family histories, and none features a bird* as its central character.

****In the famous Saga, The Prose Edda, The god Odin has two ravens, Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory), who fly across the world each day and bring him news. So there is that. Although, If indeed the game's title is a reference to The Prose Edda, then Odin never got the news that day, as both ravens took a pipe to the bonce on level 1.



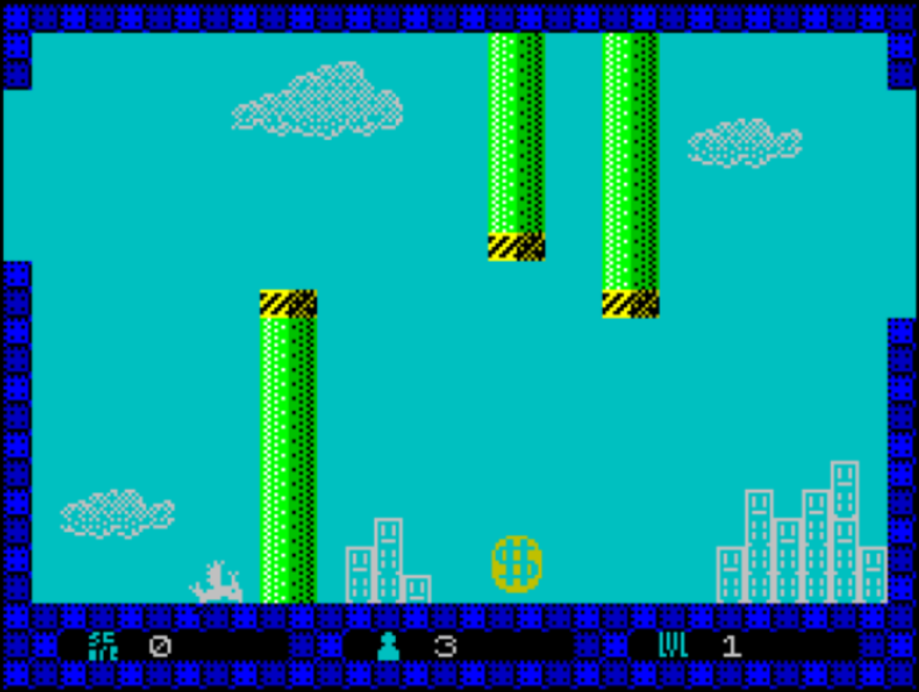
Crow-ly Diver (shoutout to Dio fans)

Flappy Saga has the notable distinction of being the first game out of the traps to be made with the brand new games engine, Kwyll. As such it is more a proof of concept than a full bells and whistles "triple A" GOTY contender.

That being said it's a completed functioning game all right and developed by someone other than the designer of the engine.

Like its inspiration it's unforgiving and tough, but it does have its addictive qualities. The graphics are well drawn and nicely animated and as Jamie has pointed out, the power ups add something to the formula.

As a calling card and a hint of the possibilities to come for this new toy for the Speccy devs of the world, it's certainly worth checking out.



Hopes of completing this were just pi-pes in the sky.

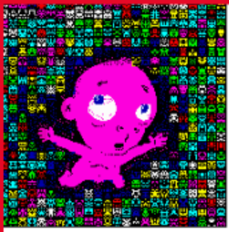
The Experiment

EJGV

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/42078

PWYW / €2

Break Space Ace



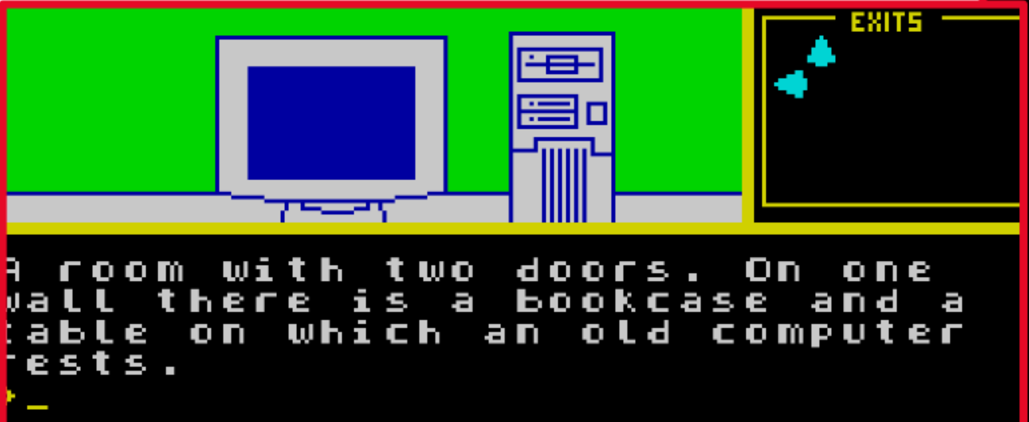
Great—a text adventure. Just what my slovenly mind needs after the two week butter-eating festival more commonly known as Christmas. The Experiment was first released in 2021 as the Spanish only "El Experimento", and unfortunately for ignorant Englishmen like me, translating the text takes more than swapping 'the' for 'el' and appending every word with 'o'. Anyway, over four years later we're lucky enough to have this English version.

It's no surprise that this game is gruesome—author EJVG has a track record of such releases with the disturbing mix of Automania + Pan's Labyrinth that was "Tiny Nightmares". The Experiment puts you right in at the deep end, with the psychological terrors of disorientation, amnesia and imprisonment, plus the more visceral terrors of actual blood, guts and dismemberment. The intro blurb tells you everything you need to know: You have woken up chained in a dark cell, with no idea how you got there. A monstrous jailer is your only company. Your goal is to escape alive.

There are a few hackneyed and fairly easy puzzles at the start, but that doesn't reflect everything that follows—this is not your average text adventure. After some progress, the game introduces you to the idea of 'remembering', where you explore your memory of events that lead up to your current predicament. So it's a game of investigating to build up a bigger picture. Doing so helps you see solutions to problems that are far more interesting than simply getting objects to perform tasks. Bit by bit everything comes together—where you are, how you got there, and how to get out.

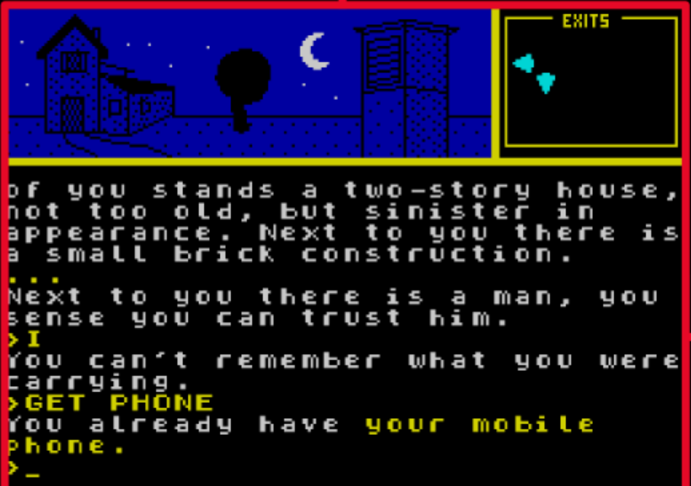
There is a viewable map (type "MAP") that grows with every location you visit. It's a cool feature, though it would come into its own for a bigger game to save an intrepid adventurer from spilling off a sheet of A4. I found the world of The Experiment small enough and memorable enough to not need mapping.

With a bit of effort, most players will manage about two-thirds of this game, though few will be able to complete it. The good news is that there's a spoiler-free hint sheet with common problems and their answers (written upside down); and there's a spoiler-spree walkthrough. In the end I needed a bit of both and didn't feel I'd let myself down. After all, in the author's own words "it's always better to finish an adventure with some help than not to finish it at all".



```
A room with two doors. On one
wall there is a bookcase and a
table on which an old computer
rests.
>_
```

LOAD Dij Dij



```
of you stands a two-story house,
not too old, but sinister in
appearance. Next to you there is
a small brick construction.
...
Next to you there is a man, you
sense you can trust him.
>I
You can't remember what you were
carrying.
>GET PHONE
You already have your mobile
phone.
>_
```

GO TO ZOOPLA

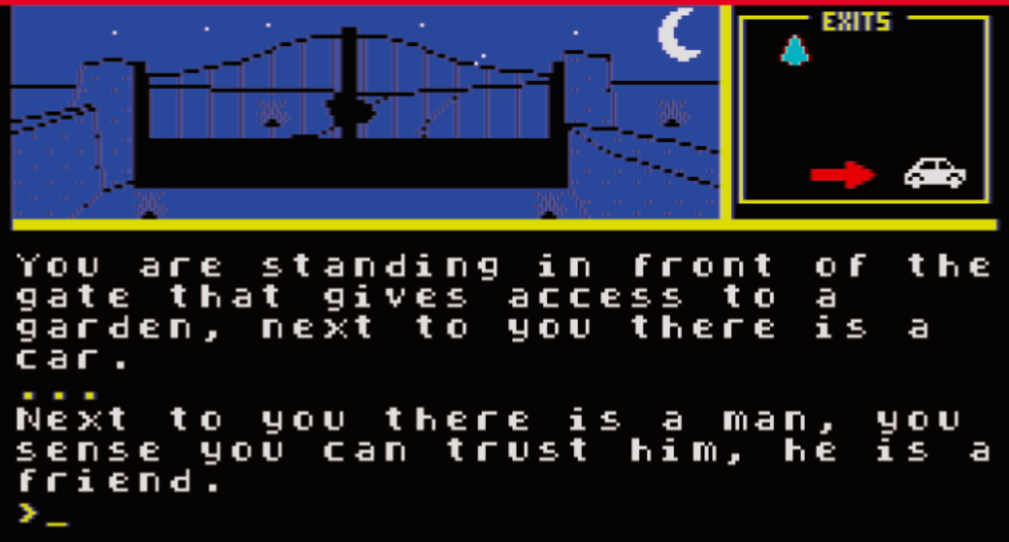
If you think text adventures are genteel puzzles in cozy libraries, The Experiment is here to correct that notion, violently. From the first move, you are plunged into graphic, gory horror, chained and helpless. It is unflinchingly challenging, but crucially, it is also fair and wants you to see its story.

The opening puzzle is a genuine ordeal, the kind seasoned adventurers will savour and newcomers might balk at. But the moment of breakthrough, of finally standing up, is profoundly satisfying.

Here, The Experiment reveals its helping hand: it includes a complete walkthrough. This allows anyone to engage with its grim world. You can wrestle with the puzzles on their own terms, or use the guide as a safety net. It perfectly caters to both the purist and those more scared of the parser than the depicted horror.

And what a story. The world is richly described and deeply unsettling. The map is a godsend, and the plot quickly escalates from escape into something far more intriguing. There are moments of shocking violence, yes, but also strange, quiet mysteries, like waking in an eerily peaceful place seconds after high drama.

All in all, The Experiment is an excellent modern text adventure. It delivers a potent, uncompromising horror experience but pairs it with a built-in guide that ensures no one is left behind. Embrace the challenge, use the tools provided, and dive in.



```
You are standing in front of the
gate that gives access to a
garden, next to you there is a
car.
...
Next to you there is a man, you
sense you can trust him, he is a
friend.
>_
```

Is he the guy from the Go Compare ads?

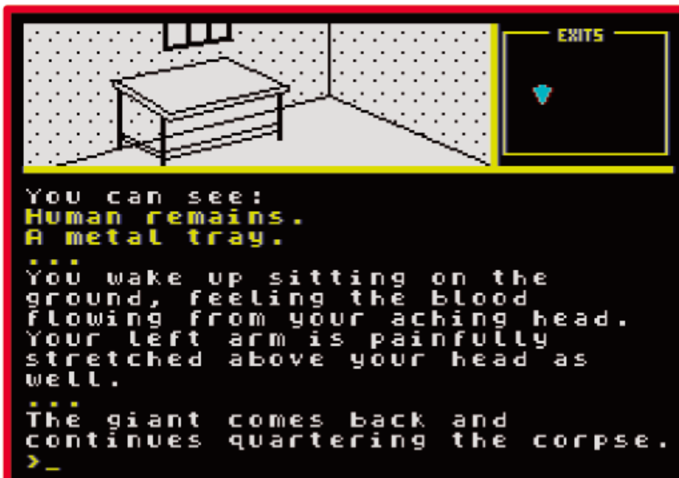
The Experiment is such an intriguing name that I had to nominate myself to review this one. It's an illustrated text adventure, and I'm reading Shaun McClure's excellent "How to Design Adventure Games" available from Amazon. Will knowing the thought processes behind making adventure games mean I'm any better at playing them now? Well, the answer is probably no, but as I just pointed out, the title of this already had me hooked.

Initial impression is that this is a horror adventure game, and reading up on the instructions after loading it and trying the usual commands, N, E, S, W, LOOK, EXAMINE etc, confirmed this - like the true pro I am, I tend to read instructions or back stories after the fact. Anyway, my initial impression was correct, and now I'm stuck in a cell with a half sawn corpse. Yikes!

After a struggle of being trapped in a cell, I found myself able to use some items of clothing to free myself, eventually. And this then opened up the gameworld to me, which is progress. Perhaps reading Shaun McClure's book is helping after all? From here, this monstrous story unfolded, and I was free to explore, also trying to avoid my captor, who put me unconscious quickly. Perhaps I missed some way to arm and/or protect myself? I need another replay.

This game feels inspired by a number of horror movies that I've heard about. Not being a horror movie fan myself, I cannot name any of them, however, not being a fan of the cinematic genre doesn't mean that I didn't enjoy this game. Its illustrations are fairly plain, but this allows your mind to fill in the blanks as you creep around the mysterious gameworld. The location descriptions give you enough of a clue of what you might need to do to escape alive. The open directions of travel are shown in the top right of the screen, which is useful.

This is a pretty good package; one which I'm sure adventure game fans will enjoy more so than I did. No hints, no spoilers, just try it. You'll be glad that you did.



```
You can see:
Human remains.
A metal tray.
...
You wake up sitting on the
ground, feeling the blood
flowing from your aching head.
Your left arm is painfully
stretched above your head as
well.
...
The giant comes back and
continues quartering the corpse.
>_
```

You're too late for the hanging and drawing

4 Hours with... Kwyll

Kwyll? What' s that?

Well, kids, Kwyll is a new way to make games for the Speccy. Yes, there are lots of other tools, such as perenninal faves MPAGD and ZXGM, but this one's brand new. And has a modernist GUI that runs on your PC that may make it easier to get to grips with. Or harder, who knows?

The best way to find out is, of course, to lurch into it without reading the manual and try to make a game in 4 hours.

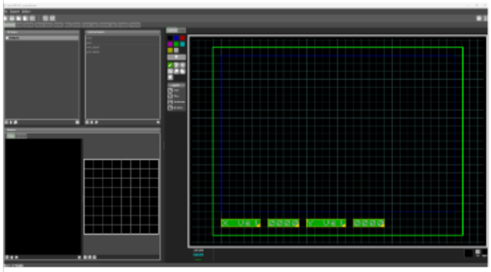
Tick tock.

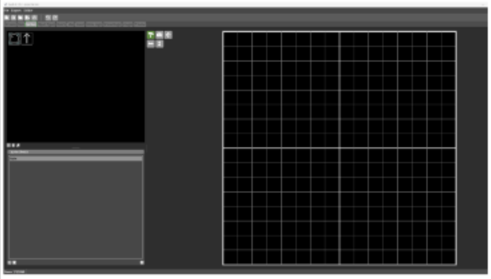
HOUR ONE

00:00
I have downloaded Kwyll.
It's a trivial install - you just need to extract the files to your PC in whatever directory you like, and run the executable. There's a splash screen where you need to insert your licence key and, most importantly, a link to the sample projects on Git. You'll be wanting to get those.

00:10
I have a putz about with the samples. There are two - both rudimentary and not in any way games. One's a JSW-style platformer, and one's in a NES Zelda top-down style. There are also tutorials. I try those.

00:25
There are 4 tutorials. I start with the one called 'projectile' because I'm a fan of The Exorcist.
First thing is to run it. On the Preview pane, there's a Play button that emulates the code in the window. Projectile allows you to set an angle and speed with which to launch a bubble across the screen, demonstrating basic physics. Let's check out the GUI and the code.





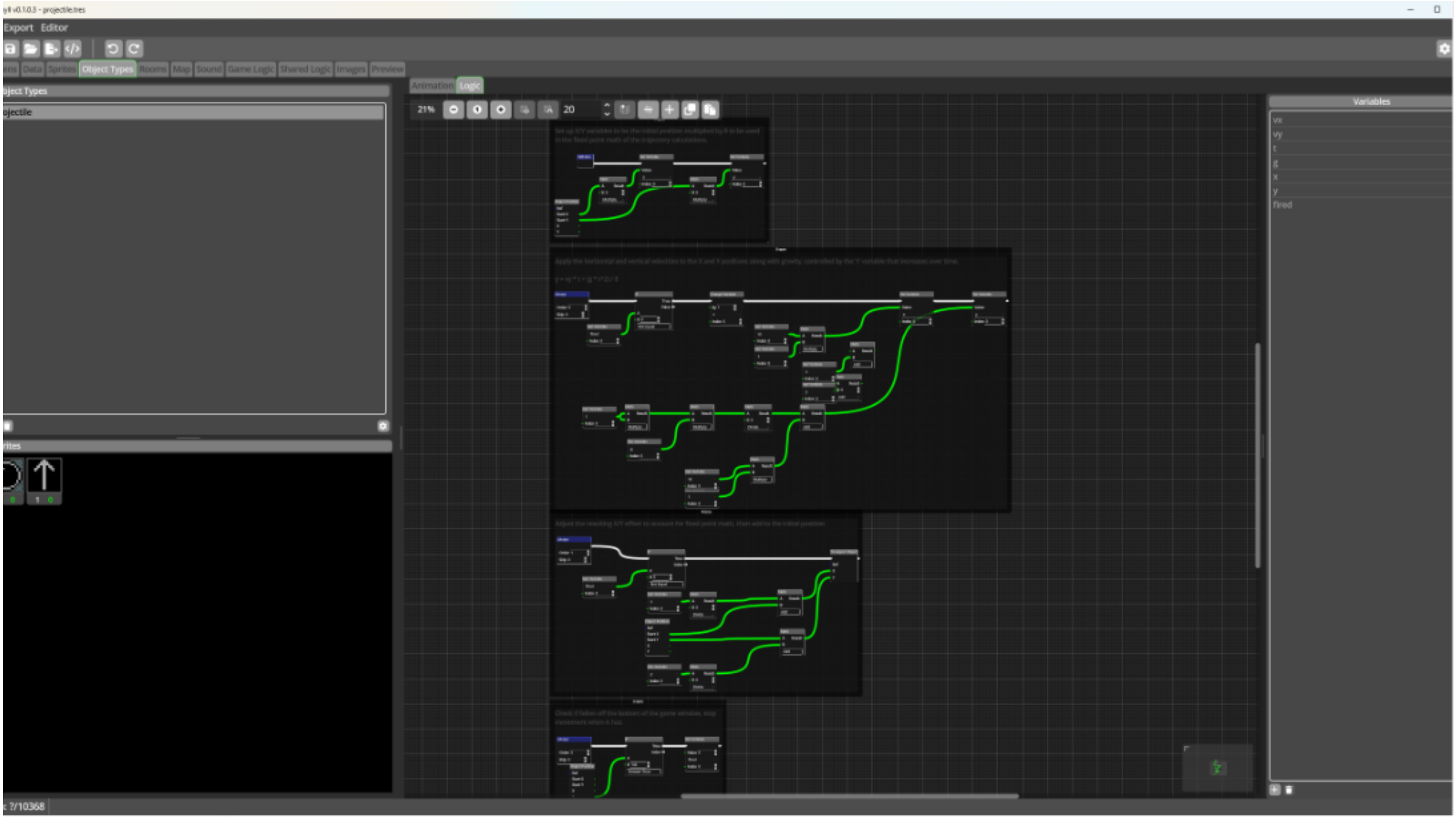
The first tab, Screens, has only one screen defined, named Default. I'm keeping up so far. Here we can see the screen layout, including the instruments for controlling the bubble. These can be edited by opening their properties (double-click) or by dragging them around the screen.

The Data tab shows number-labelled text strings. Instantly it's clear that this will easily facilitate language translations.

The Sprites tab has, well, sprites in it. Just one here, the bubble, and it only has one frame. But you can add sprites and frames in here and draw them directly. There are 3 states per pixel - On, Off and Transparent. Exciting.

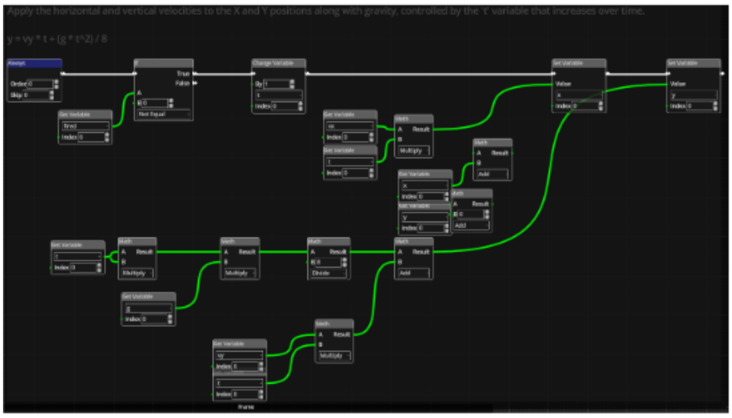
But so far, so simple. Then we get to the Object Types tab, which defines Types - there's just one here, the Projectile type. The animations are defined here for each type as well, with multiple animation loops available. Also, there's a logic mini-tab, which might be interesting.

Let's take a look at….Aaaagh!


Export Editor
Object Types
Animation Logic
21%
20
Variables
vx
vy
t
g
x
y
fired

00:35

This is the meat, apparently. Here we see the visual logic that defines how the Object operates. You'll need to scroll about a bit to see everything, including vertically. The sections are nicely commented, which is helpful and the diagrams themselves are very readable.


Apply the horizontal and vertical velocities to the X and Y positions along with gravity, controlled by the 't' variable that increases over time.

y = vy * t + (g * t^2) / 8

Always
True
False
Change Variable
Set Variable
Math
Result
Multiply
Add
Divide
Not Equal
fired
Value
Index

Here, we can see the rules for moving the bubble. Starting at the blue Always box, which will be executed every frame, this first checks the variable 'fired' and if true it moves the bubble by setting its x and y variables according to the physics calculations. It's simpler than it looks, but will take some acclimation.

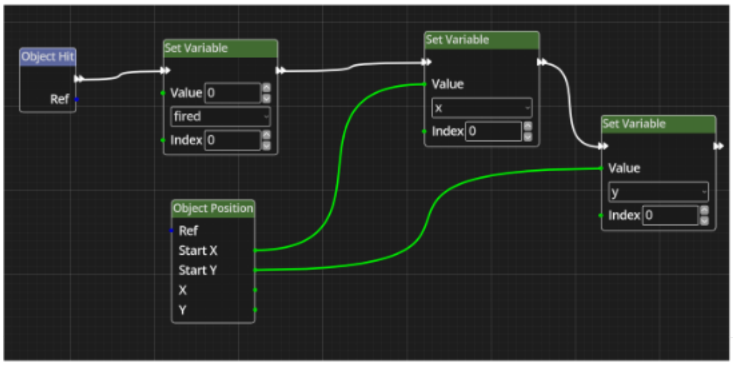
X is set to sideways velocity multiplied by time. Y is a little more complicated, as it adjusts for gravity.

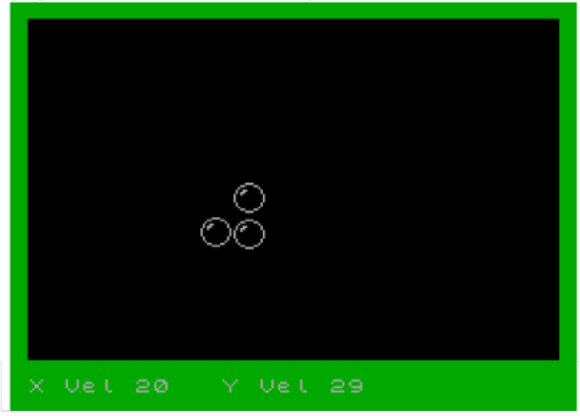
Interestingly, this brings the sprite's physics front and center which may encourage developers to dig into how their game behaves.

00:45

Can we make a game of this? What if you have to adjust the velocity to hit (or not hit) something, not unlike our BASIC type-in this issue. So, I add a new node, to reset the state if our bubble hits anything. I simply create an Object Hit node, from the drop-down of available nodes, and link it to a 'Set Variable' node. In there, I set the 'fired' variable to 0, and x and y back to whatever they were at the start.

I need something for it to hit, so I go back to the Screen definition and drag another couple of bubbles into the middle. And it works! If the launched bubble hits another one, it stops. It doesn't get removed until I fire it again, but we're only an hour in, and have a sort of a rudimentary game. Not too shabby.


Object Hit
Ref
Set Variable
Value 0
fired
Index 0
Set Variable
Value
x
Index 0
Set Variable
Value
y
Index 0
Object Position
Ref
Start X
Start Y
X
Y

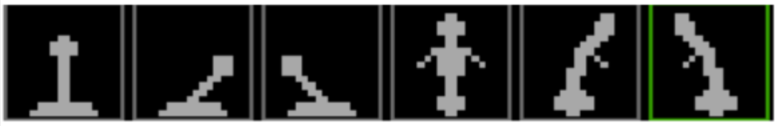

X Vel 20 Y Vel 29

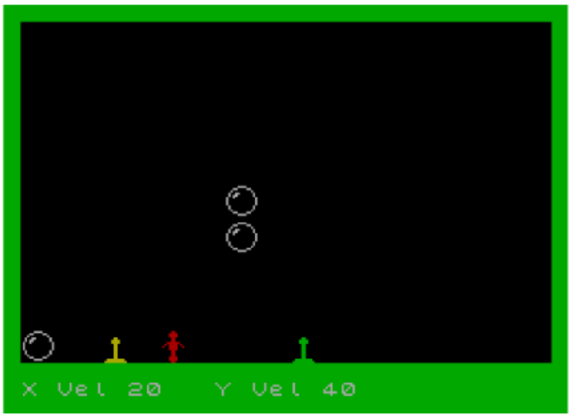
HOUR TWO

01:00

After that first hour, I took a little break, which, as it turned out, lasted 5 weeks. Oops.
Would I be able to remember how things worked?
The plus side was that a chance comment from Phil had given me a title for my 3-hour game, and I had a design in mind. *Dysfunctional Pong* is underway.

This design needed two more object types - a Lever, and player sprite. I opt for a one-wheeled robot, as that should be easy to draw. I still make a terrible job of drawing it. Programmer graphics, I believe is the term. Stop sniggering.



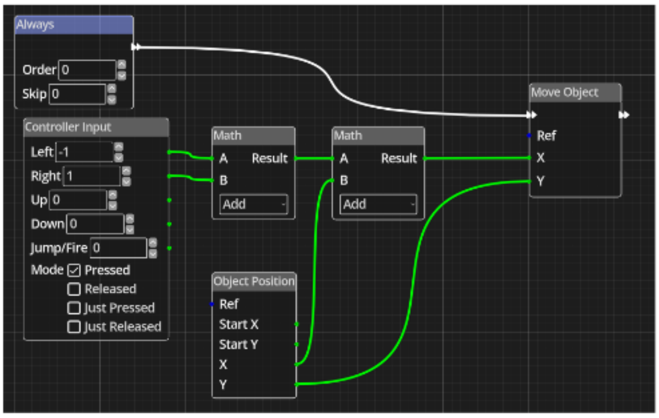


Each needs new sketches in the Sprites sheet, a new Object Type, and I drag one playerRobot and 2 levers onto the Screen.

Now, the tricky bit. I need some logic. I start with the Player.

01:10

We need this guy to move left and right. I'm not worrying about acceleration at this point, it'll be very simple. We've set the value of left as -1, the value of right as +1. We then add those to the current x position, so the guy should move left or right.



Except it doesn't. There is a pos variable in the debugger which can't be accessed from the logic directly, it seems. I can only see it in the debugger. A mystery! But easily solved : I save my progress and load the SimplePlatformController sample. This reveals a Move Object function that I'd over-looked in the dropdown, as well as an Object Position function which lets me get the position data. I note that the MoveObject needs both x and y inputs, or else it'll snap the robot to the top of the screen.

I need one more sprite - a Pong paddle. I can draw this one no problem, and plonk it down on the left.

Next, I need to :

Change how the ball moves.
Get the paddle working if the ball hits it.
And figure out those levers.

Two hours remain.

HOUR THREE

02:00

First things first : remove the original ball logic, as I don't need any gravity here, just some simple bouncing about.

You can remove a whole section by simply removing the connection between the instigating Always node - once you do that, the following logic won't ever trigger. And you can easily put it back in if you need.

Speccy x,y variables remain confusing - 0,0 is top left, not bottom left as I'm more used to, thanks to *thousands of years of mathematical standards*. But I add some checks : if the ball goes to move out of bounds, make it bounce by multiplying the velocity by -1. Sure enough, it pings about like a champ.

02:10

That's all very well, but I need it to stop if it hits the left wall, and bounce off the paddle.
At this point, I am no longer able to add new nodes in the logic editor. I save the project, open another one, and can't anything there either. I have to close Kwyll after a few minutes of trying to fix it, and open it again. Precious minutes wasted!

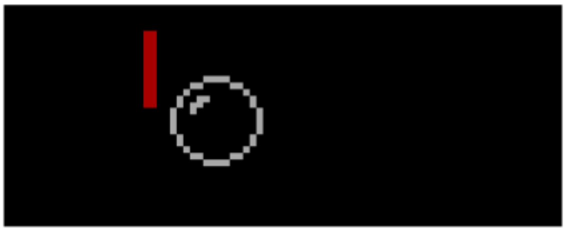
02:25

Anyway., Where was I?

Right. The paddle.

There's a 'Object Hit' function as earlier, so I select one of those.
That box has a reference which we can use with the 'Is Type' check to determine what we've bumped into. I think. Let's see.

It works, more or less. The ball bounces, not exactly when it hits the paddle, but the tile that the paddle is in. It's not checking collision by pixel, it's checking by the tile. Even with the paddle drawn as far right as possible, the ball isn't quite making contact. Can live with that, I guess.



Of course, I could adjust the sprite sizes to make them match up, but…4 hours, remember.

Basically, the paddle works. Huzzah!

02:40

The gosh-darned levers.

So, the idea is that the robot has to move left and right to operate the levers, which move the paddle up and down. You didn't think you'd be able to operate the paddle with the up and down controls, did you? Pffft. That's not the Break Space way.

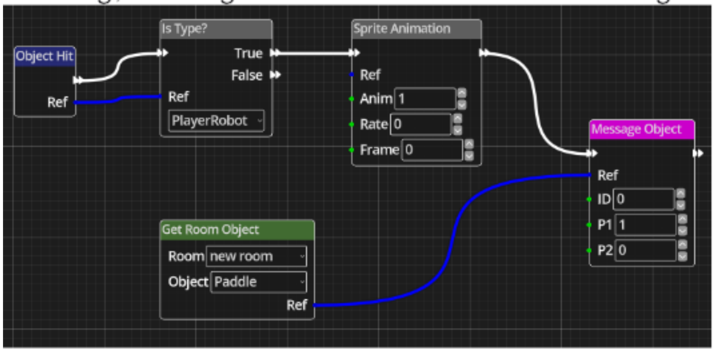
So - very simply, if the robot is in contact with the left lever, the paddle goes down. And vice versa.

This is simply using the 'Object Hit' control again…hopefully.

The issue is that I need to send a message to the paddle telling it to move. There's a 'Message Object' but that requires me to know the ID of the paddle. Which I don't. I am forced to bring shame upon my family, and look at the documentation.

Which is, it should be said, very nicely presented at the website (https://docs.kwyll.com/)

I quickly find that there's an option called Get Room Object, which lets me pick up the object I need, and pass the message. I should have found that myself. Forgive me, Grandfather. The paddle is now moving, although I do have to do some fiddling about to get the 2 different levers to go different directions.



PlayerRobot

Anim 1
Rate 0
Frame 0

ID 0
P1 1
P2 0

Room new room
Object Paddle

So all that I have to do is add scoring every time you hit the paddle, maybe randomise the direction of the ball when it starts and reset when the ball misses.

That won't take long, but..Time's almost up!

Can't get too fancy, here.

HOUR FOUR

03:00

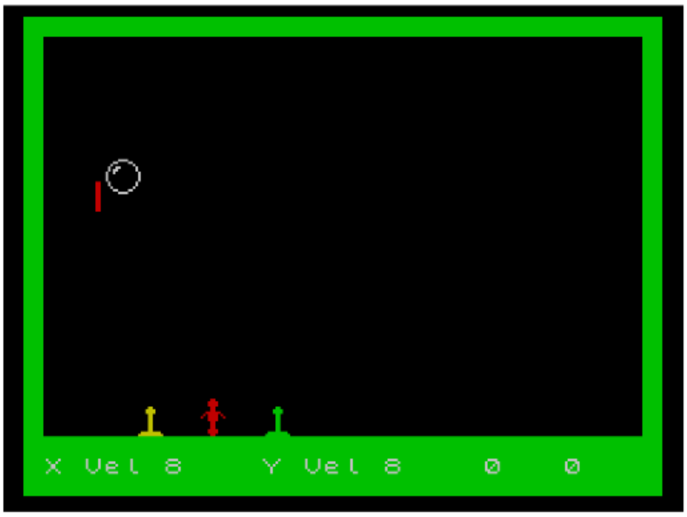
Things move quickly in hour 4. I'm trying not to learn anything new, instead re-using the basic techniques that I've come up with to add what I'm going to optimistically call 'polish'. The bar is low.

First up, I randomise the launch direction of the ball. There's a handy 'Randomise' box from where you can get a number. I go for between -2 and 2 for y, so the ball can launch at an upwards or downwards slant, and set the velocity accordingly. There's also a 'Random Seed' so you can get proper randomisation - I haven't got time to figure that out, so every game will start the same for now.

I populate an instrument on screen called Score, which I make increment every time the ball hits the paddle. And I stop the ball bouncing off the left wall - that's round over now.

The game is far too hard at this point, so I think about slowing the ball down. Easily done, and I tweak it so that the ball speeds up on every point.

The GUI freezes up occasionally, which is disappointing, but I've always been able to save progress and not lose anything. A few more tweaks and I look at the clock..and I'm done.



03:45

With a quarter hour to spare, no less. But I'm leaving a few minutes to actually build the thing.
As it turns out, this is a one-click Export operation, which takes just a few seconds to extrude a plain old .tap file, alongside the C code that Kwyll generates behind the scenes.

So I have a little time to load my masterpiece into Fuse and play it a bit. It's absolutely terrible.

Summing up..

For a first test of a new tool, this has gone really well. And I haven't even touched on a whole bunch of features.
The engine supports multiple layers, so you control which sprites pass in front of others.
Sprites of assorted sizes are supported.
There's support for building maps, with entry and exit point for Zelda / Jet Set Willy style exploration.
There's audio support built in.
The documentation is excellent, and it being reviewed and improved as we speak.

I found the interface pretty intuitive, although there is a mind-set of working backwards to get simple things done. X = X+1 becomes Get Variable X → Math +1 → Set Variable X. If you're coming from an old-school coding background, that may take some getting used to.

There are different layers of logic, too, with Game Logic, Room Logic and Object Logic.
Where's the best place to put a particular function? I have no idea.

There is an active community on the Kwyll forums, where you can get your questions asked. There's a lot to learn, and lots of help to learn it.

If I have one major concern, it's the number lurking in the bottom left of the screen, representing how much memory you have to work with. On a new, blank project, you're starting with a smidge under 10k of free memory, with the engine features taking up the rest of your 48k. 128k support is a future possibility, but the engine size may prove to be a limiting factor.

Most importantly though, I had great fun with this, and hope to get more than a few hours to dig in some more.

For full details, check out kwyll.com, or https://indigobeetle.itch.io/kwyll

Manic Mailers

Talk to us!

Tell us what you like, or don't like. Its the only way we'll get better.

Send an email to BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com

In the frame

Love the magazine, keep up the good work! Really appreciate the review of Racetrack Riches - I have printed it out and will be framing it. My inner 15-year-old thanks so much for making his long awaited dreams come true.
Bedroom-coders, via Itch.io

Brings a tear to the eye, it does! We're eagerly waiting on a photo of the framed page. Keep us updated.

He giveth, and he taketh away

This Magazine is the very best I´ve came across in all these years since the 80s. Outstanding work.

I do think you are better than Crash actually. Even though Crash has a professional sophisticated traditional graphic design, your content is way better.
iCreateWorlds, via itch.io

What an emotional rollercoaster that was. Thanks for the kind words, and we apologise for our amateurish, clumsy look. The 3rd page of the HACK PACK is a disgrace, frankly. We have a different focus from Crash, and while it's really not a competition, it's nice to be thought of in the same ballpark.

Regarding Issue 3

Wow, how many hours have gone into that! It's your best-looking issue yet guys. I also love the little developer insights in games like Asymmetry. That's really valuable. Great work everyone, this mag is a real asset to the community.
Avenging Lettuce @ itch.io

How many hours? Too many hours, but all worthwhile in the end. Thank Dave for the clever technical bits, he's good like that.

Flicky

I had a flick through (in the way that I always used to between the newsagents and the classroom) while waiting for progress bars to ... well... progress. Reminded me of 1984's magazines, only with far fewer adverts and less black-and-white pages :-). I'll have to give it a proper read through later!
scrrwm, at SpectrumComputing

Well, scrrwm, I hope you're managed to read through it by now. You don't want to build up a backlog.

Please reserve a copy of Break Space magazine for me :

____

every quarter. Thank You!

Ensure you never miss an issue by reserving Break Space at your newsagent. Simply print out this form, fill in your name in block capitals on the line and present it to the sales assistant at the counter.
They won't know what's going on, and may ask you to leave the premises, but the humiliation will remind you to check for a new issue every 3 months at least.

Syrion - The Time of the Dragon

Sisko_MSX

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44707

PWYW / €2

Oh, another explorer type platform game, eh? I'm becoming rather fond of these: gone are the memories of Jet Set Willy and its nightmarish difficulty (just my opinion) as these modern days Speccy games are all of a pretty high standard and without the bugs. Syrion - The Time of the Dragon certainly is this. And although an alluring title, it has nothing to do with a sudden resurgence of Dragon Data, sadly. (Hey, I quite liked the Dragon 32, you know).

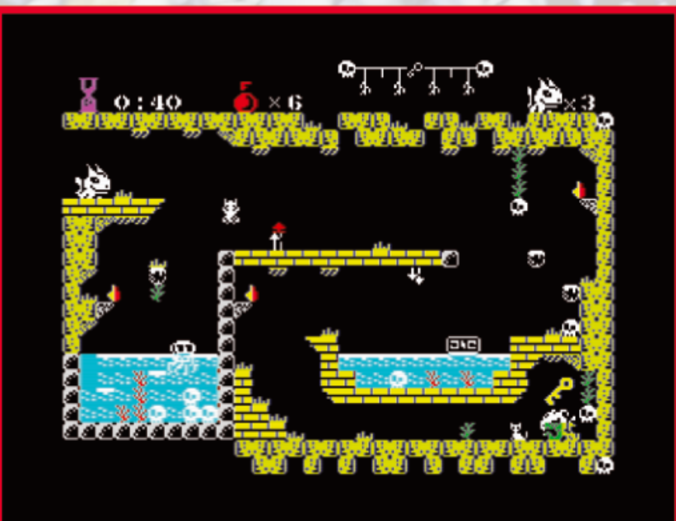
The task is to guide our cute hero, Syrion, through multiple hazardous screens venturing to retrieve a special and rare Egg against a time limit, though your deadline may (and initially must) be extended by collecting the sometimes precariously placed egg timers (otherwise known as hourglasses, apparently). Some areas require unlocking too, which you do initially by the yanking of chains.

Our protagonist is unarmed at first. Collect the bomb shaped power up to give Syrion a fire ball breath which is really quite destructive, removing roamers with extreme prejudice. However, these are limited in number, so any thoughts of being trigger-happy will exhaust your supply quickly. A lack of fireballs will render some parts of the game difficult, nae impossible, therefore leading to a failed quest. The best strategy is always to avoid any roamers whenever possible, though like nearly all games in this genre, trial and error is your only guide.

Syrion is able to jump and manoeuvre mid-flight, which makes things a bit easier as the roamers are set in mesmerising patterns. This means that you are able to find some short cuts on certain screens, making it easier and saving valuable seconds.

Owners of AY-equipped 128K machines get to enjoy a short and dramatic tune on repeat, adding tension and some enjoyment to this production, though it all runs on those 48K computers too. The sound effects are beeper driven with some appropriate bleeps and bloops in the right places.

To summarise: Syrion - The Time of the Dragon has clear and crisp graphics, sharp controls and fluid gameplay, a succulent and slightly moody AY tune, and pretty good sound effects too. And all of this production value comes in at a name your own price game. There may be a day when I tire of such 2D platformers, but it is not this day, and certainly not with the sort of quality we're seeing. Although not an Ace, it is still ace, y'know.



Bath time! Wash the soot off your nose, kid.

I can proudly say that I can break two eggs into the frying pan at once. Granted, the left hand one is more juiced than cracked, but it gets the job done and who wants two runny yokes anyway. That's normal hen's eggs mind, not your Egg of Eternal Fire, the ancient symbol of balance and power for the Dragons of Ecos. And as such, I wouldn't dream of touching it let alone cooking it sunny side up. But that's the brief of the game: someone has stolen the egg, and it's Syrion's job to find it. Getting the 3 keys is the first task, which with a bit of back and forth opens up new sections of the map.

This is a well-above-average flipscreener, and even though keys, doors, levers and teleports aren't exactly groundbreaking ideas, the game feels fresh somehow. Maybe it's the result of being made by a father/son team. Dad provides the functionality and technical nous, and Son has an imagination not bound by forty years of dogma. Or maybe the other way round, only with 12 years instead of 40. All that really matters is that this is an incredibly impressive first game for anyone. It may not get an Ace (could we get a third opinion on that please Ed?), but at the very least it gets a chef's kiss for those grumpy-looking dragons.

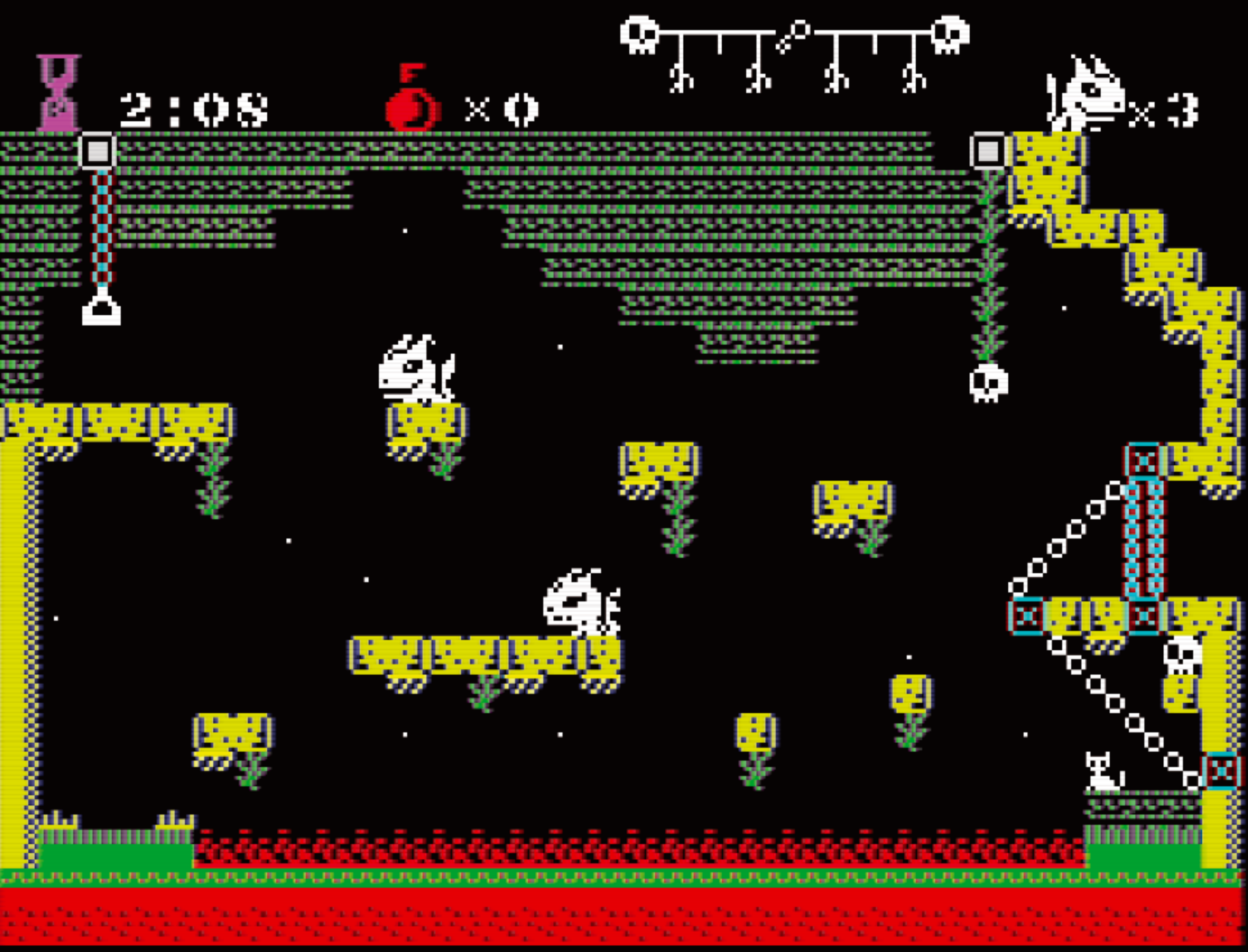
Very well. The fellas want a third, definitive opinion? Then I'll suppose I'd better give them one.

It's a crowded field, the 2-D platformer on the Spectrum. A quick scan of the review list as we close out this issue shows 19 of 'em, and 2 of those featuring dragons. You really have to do something special to stand out.

Does Syrion do that? Almost. It looks great, I'll give it that without hesitation, with cute little dragons and zombies wandering back and forth in standard fashion. It uses locked doors to funnel you through the screens in sequence, without the free-roaming opportunities of a Jet Set Willy, but with the impression that you're still exploring a large map. Each individual screen is well thought out, with jumping puzzles to exercise those timing instincts that we've all developed over years of leaping about. The air-control jumping is standard as well, what we've come to expect from the modern Speccy platformer.

The tight rationing of fireballs adds another level too, with some choices to be made about when to use them. Sometimes it's best to keep them. Sometimes, the time saved by just blasting through a problem makes it worth the cost. Because the main differentiator here is the tight time-limit, which means that it's not enough to clear a screen, you have to do it quickly. Hourglasses appear occasionally to top up your clock, but these are rare enough that you'll be under pressure. Just when you think you're doing well, you realise that you're in time deficit and there's nothing you can do. It's another failure state to avoid, and adds a lot to the challenge.

It looks good, sounds good, plays good. But - is it enough for an Ace? Almost, but somehow the familiarity of the platforming overshadows the game's unique points. For an initial effort though, this is quite remarkable. A fine start, and if you're a platform game die-hard, this stands out amongst the crowd.



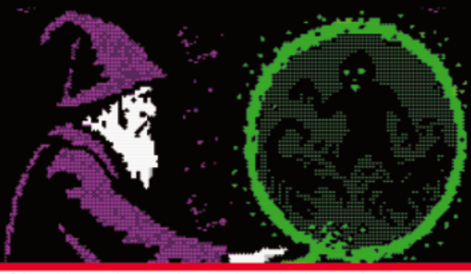
LOST : White cat, fond of warm spots. Reward offered.

Magic Adventures

MANsoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44651

PWYW / €2



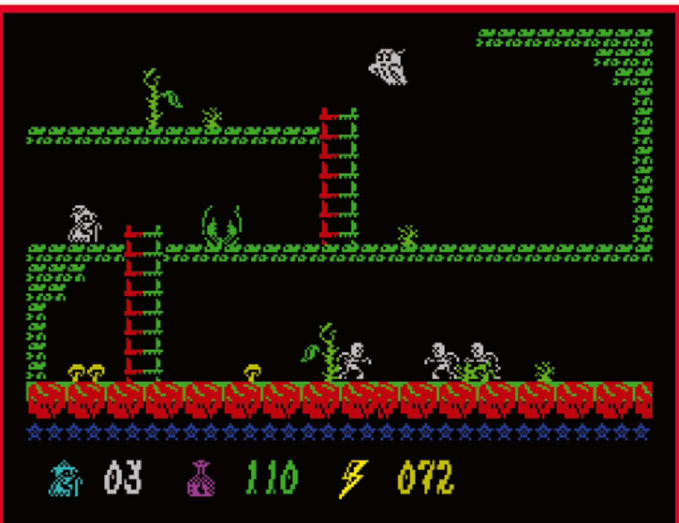
Casting spells can be dangerous, and our little stick-wielding Wizard Mordebruk has committed to one spell too many. And just like that, he has been transported into another realm. In order to get back to his own, our hero must retrieve four items, as follows: the Chalice of Power, a Sacred Cross, a Magic Key and a Spell Scroll. Achieving this, and returning our rather nifty enchanter to his own world requires navigating platforms, ladders and avoiding hazards and pitfalls in an explorer-type 2D game. And although armed with magic, leading to a mental impression of "shoot the baddies, and collect the stuff" type thing, it's a little more complicated than that.

Like Hammer Knight (BreakSpace issue 3, pages 60-61), this game has essentially two action buttons, as well as up/down/left/right controls. Our bearded, hat-wearing sorcerer can expel with prejudice some magical orbs that'll dispatch the evil roaming spirits, bats, fish and other nasties that are lethal to him, doing so reduces his life and magic energy; the life energy, symbolised with a lightning bolt, can be recovered if he can find a safe place to recuperate, whilst the magic energy looks if not plentiful, but like it'll last a while until you realise that it reduces by two each time, rather than by one. So, whilst it's fun to dispatch his foes, one should not be too hasty and drain his strength and magic too quickly, otherwise you are unable to jump to new locations. This is more strategic than the average platform game, though you also need to do some exploring first.

The graphics within this wonderful binary world are well animated; I really like the dynamic look of Mordebruk as he leaps around the place. Unlike Manic Miner and other games of its ilk, where jumping is just the main sprite simply has a "walking on air" look, here you can see that an extra sprite frame really makes a difference and is actually somehow more convincing. It's the small details, sometimes. And whilst you can manoeuvre and fall from great heights, I wouldn't recommend doing so from one screen to another unless you're certain that the place that you're falling into is hazard free, or there is no other path.

The nasty enemies of our pishogue move in set patterns, which of course can help once you've played long enough to memorise said patterns, so each new location becomes a learning thing. Not that this makes things necessarily any easier, but at least it means that it's not unduly unfair: you lose lives because of impatience or because you forgot that up and jump are mapped to different keys again!

It all runs perfectly on the original 48K machines too, though a touch of AY music would have been welcome on the beefier models. That said, I don't mind the comforting familiarity of the classic beeper. This whole package is pure skillo: beautifully presented, surprisingly thoughtful, and a whole lot of fun too.



Bone thugs in harmony

So the story goes that Mordebruk was a powerful wizard who suffered a mishap while casting a spell (I dunno, wand the wrong way round or something) and has of course been transported to another universe filled with evil creatures and unsuspected dangers. Sounds like my career.

Anyway in order to win at life he needs to escape all the dangers and return to his own world. Of course there are conditions. He needs to find the Chalice of Power, the Sacred Cross, the Magic Key, and the Spell Scroll to open the Magic Portal. Let's face it we've all been there. In my case it was the Chalice from the Palace, but that's not important right now.

Mordebruk (crazy name, crazy guy) as well as being able to jump his own height from a standing start can also throw energy balls to vapourise his enemies. Apparently ghosts don't like protein... What? Not that kind of energy ball? Please yourself. So you can fire energy but this is not an infinite resource, as each time you fire the counter goes down and you have to find a recharge. When you run out you have to, er, run out to avoid all the ghosts and bats and spiders etc. As you roam around the maze you avoid baddies, collect power ups and generally hop and zap your way to victory. Except most of the time you don't.

It's a very hard game, sorry, a "challenge" and if you like something to sink your teeth into (and I can think of several things I'd like to) then this will be a mountain you'll happily climb. I do love that cute little animation of a headstone when you bork yourself. Good job too cos you see it a lot.

For me the look and feel of this game was like a cross between Manic Miner and Jetpac or PSSST! A feeling of having to spritz the gribblies with a diminishing amount of energy balls while jumping around platforms to collect meaningful items.

I didn't like the way you have to jump by pushing up and to the left or right, that felt cumbersome. But I suppose in Kempstonville you're always catering for directions plus a single fire button with all Speccy games, so having jump OR fire be the fire button is a choice you have to make. I guess this was the best decision in the circumstances, but it makes a hard game so much harder.

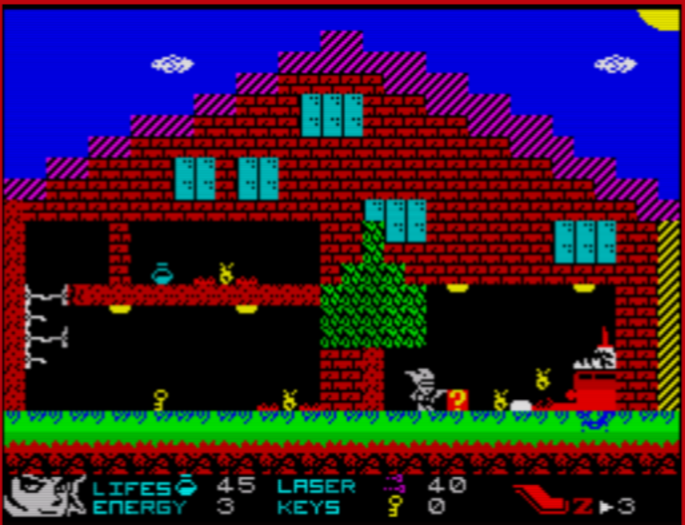
That said, when you do get it down pat and move correctly avoiding gribblies and firing you feel like a John Woo hero jumping while firing two 45s. I suppose mastery is the true Magic Adventure.

Mazinger Z: Koji to the Rescue of Super Alloy Z!

Clanbyte

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45176

PWYW / $2



Young Koji, oblivious to his house being on fire

Cards on the table - I'm not an anime fan. I don't think I've ever seen an anime. I might have seen Akira round a friend's house when I was a kid – but that's manga. Is that the same thing? I haven't got a clue. I prefer The Flintstones. My little nephew insists anime is far more rooted in reality than The Flintstones. Well then… let's see, shall we?

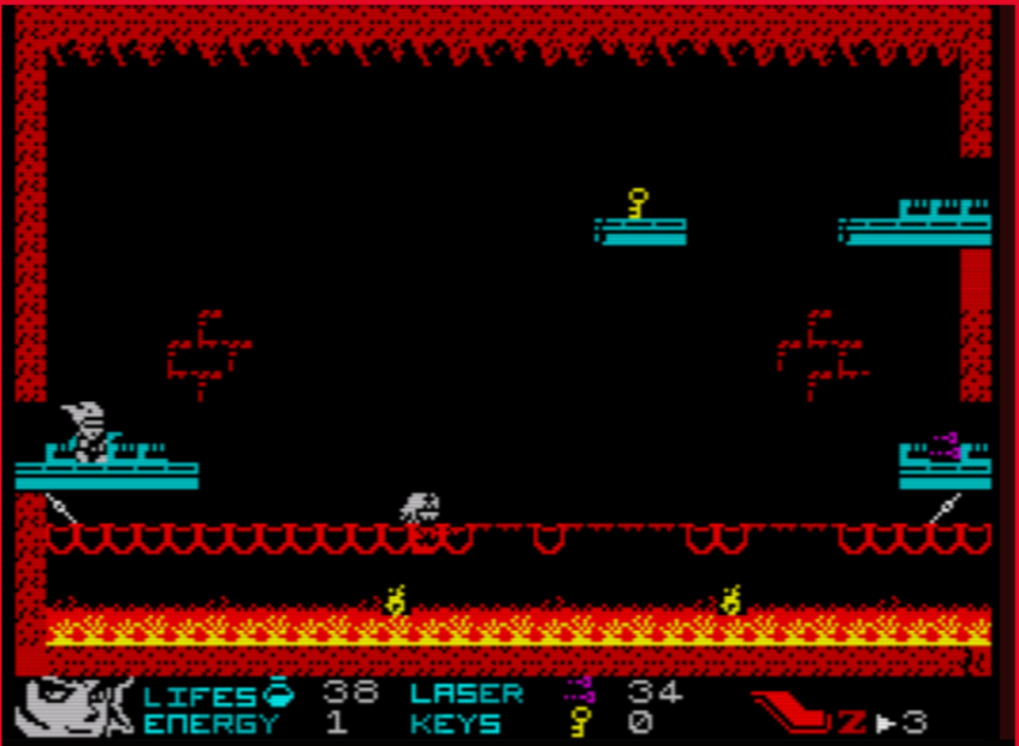
Mazinger Z (Koji to the Rescue) starts off in your cabin – which is where you keep your flying hovercraft. Mmm. Not a very realistic start, if you ask me, but then I've never been to Japan.

Try as I might, I couldn't take the flying hovercraft outside the cabin – so its only real purpose seems to be replacing the broken staircase and taking you up to the second floor. It feels like a rather expensive solution to a broken staircase… and it's a shame you can't take it outside. It would have made little Koji's mission a damn sight easier, and he could have saved the world and still been home in time to watch Tipping Point.

Your mission sees you crossing five stages to reach the fortress of Doctor Hell, where you must retrieve the three stolen fragments of Super Alloy Z. You're equipped with a laser, but you can also dispatch enemies by jumping on their heads, Super Mario–style – which is far more satisfying and helps conserve ammo. Conserving ammo is important, because you'll need your lazer to gain access to different areas by shooting down vulnerable walls. At one point I ran out of ammo and couldn't advance!

The music is surprisingly relaxing for a Speccy game – a bit "Zelda-ish" – and it suits the gameplay well. You're given a very generous number of lives (46!), and you only lose one after using up your three energy points. It sounds like a lot, but with the abundance of traps and hazards, and enemies who won't stay dead - you'll work your way through the lives quicker than a tub of pringles.

The game is made with ZXGM, and being a ZXGM title you probably know what to expect in terms of gameplay by now. That said, this is one of the better entries in the ZXGM canon, and if you're into your anime or the old Mazinger Z Tv series, I'm sure you'll have a Yabbo-Dabbo-Doo time with it!



THIS is where a flying hoverboard would come in handy

Pah! Unlike my uncultured colleague I've seen loads of Anime, I've seen everything from the Simpsons to Count Duckula. I'm not sure who this Mazinger Zed fellow is though. Maybe he's Dragonball Zed's brother. In any case he's got a Spectrum game now, which puts him up there with The Muncher and Fireman Sam, so he must be important.

Mazinger's adventures start off in a neat little house, with some dangerous open flames. I like the wee hovercraft thing - it reminds me of the platform you ride in New Zealand Story. Although using it is a bit fiddly, I share Jon's opinion that it might be a fun mechanic to have use of on later screens.

The music is great, the graphics are nice and it's refreshing to see lots of splashes of colour as you go underground, overground Mazingerling free. I'm a fan of the cute way your character looks like he's holding up a little white flag when he dies. Good job too, as it happens ruddy loads.

There are plenty of things to stomp on and shoot. There are pseudo-puzzly bits with doors that can only be unlocked by killing baddies. There are satisfying bits and there are frustrating bits where you'll absolutely tear through the seemingly generous "lifes" you've been given.

Overall though it's a fun enough romp which, for better or worse, plays very similarly to quite a few other games that have been released recently.

Single Dragon

JuanGM

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44759

PWYW / $2

No this is not a game about a spinster serpent. Nor is it an 8bit dating app. Nor is it an Ang Lee film (you're thinking of 'Single Dragon, Hidden Microwave Lasagna').

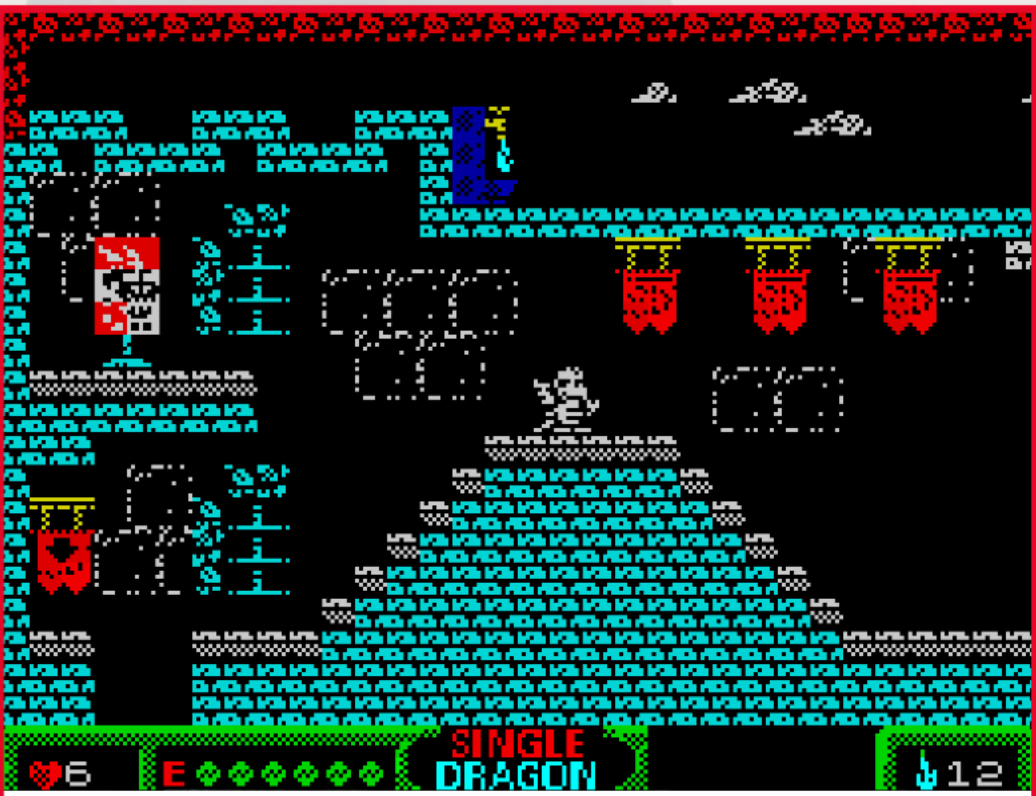
Here's the pitch: you play a dragon, and everyone knows that a dragon's worst enemy is water, so you have to destroy the outdoor spigots being installed all over the kingdom. Not exactly Disney is it? And it's irresponsible—the societal importance of easy access to clean water is taken hugely for granted. However, I won't let my distaste of such Wyvernian hooliganism taint this review. Also, I'm a sucker for a Speccy game with a barmy plot.

What sets Single Dragon out from others in the genre is the limited flight ability. It's not like running out of fuel in Thrust, here you can only fly about half the screen before you need to recharge with feet on terra firma. This makes for a very different playing experience. You don't so much soar up the rock faces as scramble, always looking for the next resting place. Attacking the baddies requires similar planning, in smash and grab raids with a ledge kept within reach. But what you lack in aerobatics you make up for in artillery with unlimited fireballs to breathe.

There's more to it than just wandering around destroying drinking fountains. Sections of the map need unlocking by killing all the baddies on a screen or shooting a suit of armour. You're never left wondering what to do though: text at the bottom of the screen tells you when everything on the needs dispatching, and in the case of the water cisterns you get a very assertive "FRY IT!" message. I like that the newly unlocked pathway is always visible on the same screen. You won't always be able to reach it directly, but you'll know where you need to head.

The town planners have created a varied world to explore, and have been particularly officious in installing cisterns from catacomb to castle, via a well-kept green belt, and gasp… waterways! To get through those you need to shoot switches that transform the deadly ponds into nice safe molten lava. I'm glad Lancashire County Council don't have those or my upcoming canal boat holiday would be considerably less relaxing.

This is a really absorbing flipscreener with a twist. It's not hard, but the lives allowance is austere, so I'd recommend playing with POKEs to complete it. If you do it'll take about an hour, and during that time you'll hear Jean Michelle Jarre's 'Oxygene pt.4' repeated on a loop about 16 times. And you won't mind in the slightest.

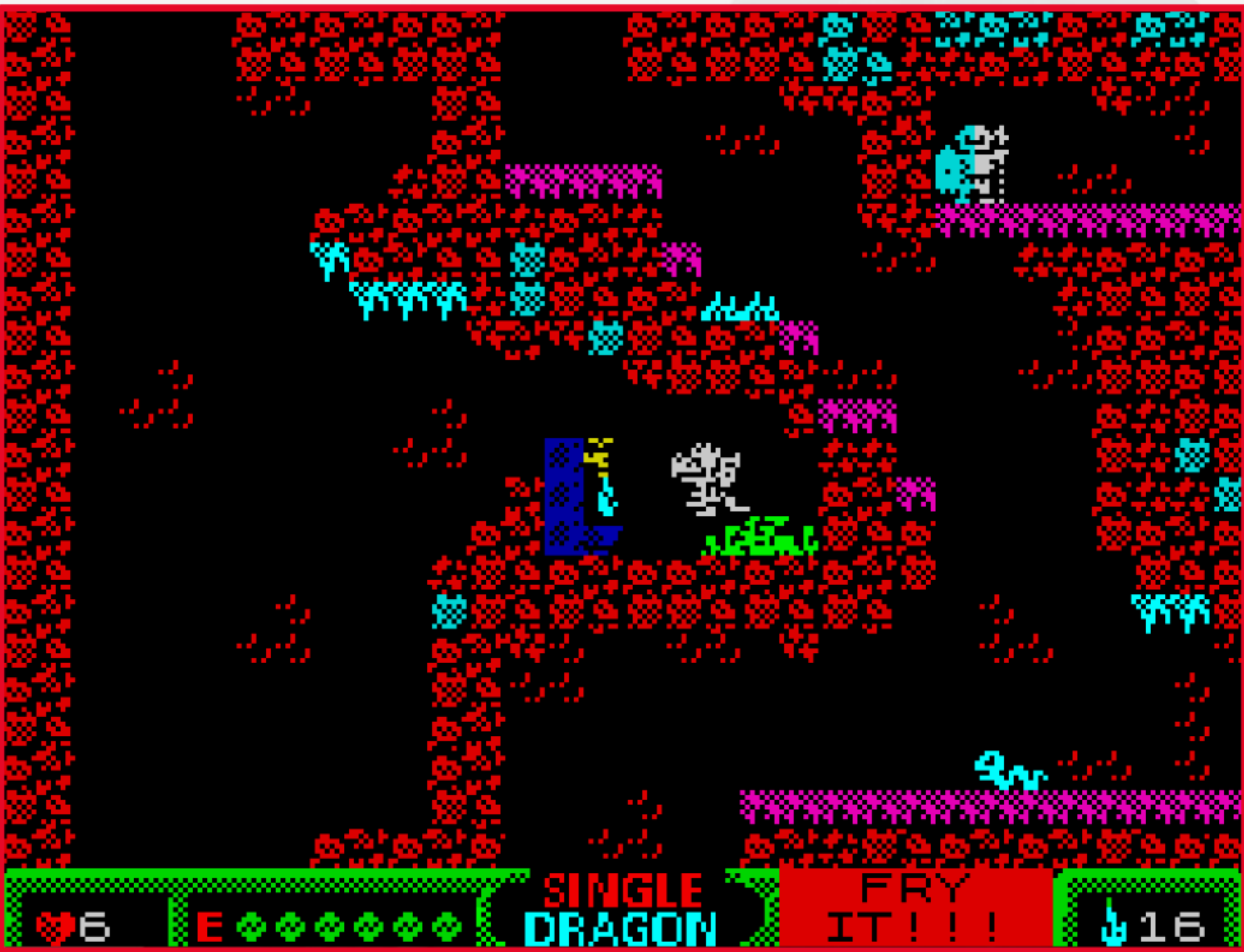


There really ought to be a Beyonce joke here.

Single Dragon is another pretty damn good release from JuanGM, presented as a flick screen type platform adventure. In this quest, I particularly like the jump mechanic, our hero here is able to fly, but only a limited distance, as his energy depletes as he does, but it's usually just enough to get you to the next safe place to rest, or to unlock new parts of the grand binary game world. When your flappy wings won't carry you, some thinking is then needed. Unlike some other games that use this "limited fly" mechanic, the energy to re-fly is restored instantly, to prevent a second or two of unnecessary waiting.

I feel that today's Speccy owners are very spoiled for entertainment software these days; of course, we stand on the shoulders of giants, but it is nonetheless a good feeling to see so much quality and so often. Single Dragon is an excellent example of this, great graphics, sharp controls, good music, and a John-Michel Jarre tribute accompanying your adventure. I like the learning curve here too: it doesn't seem to get too difficult too quickly, or where it does get difficult, it is muscle memory training that helps later on in the game.

Another day, another smart release, and yet another that I'm recommending to you. Single Dragon is simply another great addition to the modern Speccy golden age. Polished, addictive, entirely playable even if a light touch approach is required at times, it's an easy recommendation. Go play it.



Dragons : the original Air Fryers

Break Space Rough Guide to : Bulgaria

Check out those cool dragons with their cool egg. Nice, eh? If you want to check them out in real life, you will need to get yourself to Bulgaria. More specifically, the beach at Varna, on the Black Sea. Sculpted by Darin Lazarov, these 2 proud parents are just near the swimming pool. Maybe not worth an international trip just to see them, but hey, Depends where you're starting from.

Nothing to do with Spectrums or games or anything, really. Just a cool dragon statue. No need to thank us.

Rebel Wars

Mananauk

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44713

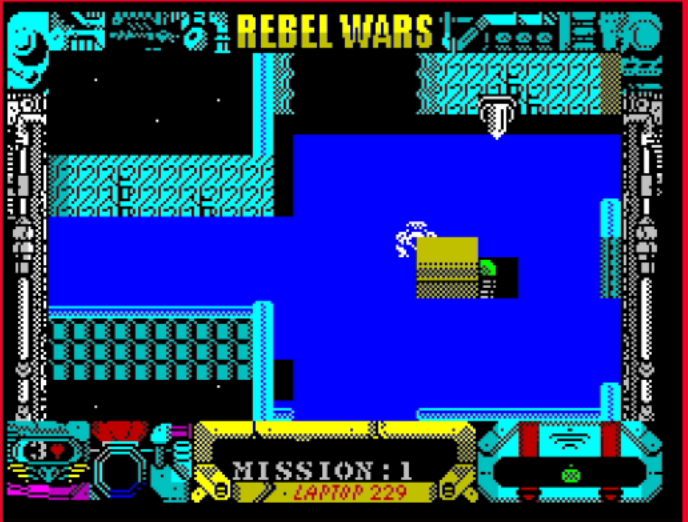
€2.00

In the void of space, no one can hear your beeper tunes, but that's okay. As we awake from hypersleep, suit up in Ultramarine body armour, grab our machine guns, and head to the airlock, we can hear the tunes just fine.

The game itself is a "maze-em-up". A new term I just invented for this review. You search the maze-like spaceship, find items that unlock new areas, and free the prisoners. I don't usually like maze games, as I get lost easily and have no natural sense of direction, but the mild difficulty and clear objectives here make exploration rewarding.

Rebel Wars masterfully mixes its 80s sci-fi influences, drawing from Alien and Space Crusade to create a compelling and cohesive vision. It presents alien-infested space hulks where parasitic nasties lurk behind every door, prisoners are trapped, and ship computer systems need to be brought under control. Thematically, it's very strong.

Graphically, the game also shines. The choice of colours and the attention to detail speak to the love the creators have poured into this project, and it pays off. Every graphical detail is a delight: the isometric plants, the chairs, the diagonal corridor sections, the sparing use of bright green, and the yellow unit tops. Everything works so well. It's a joy to uncover new rooms and see the artwork on display.



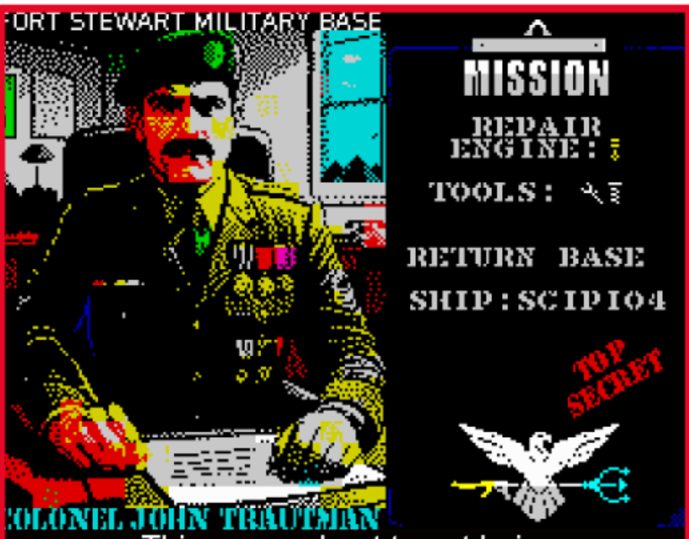
Cover shooter

The game ambitiously attempts a pseudo-isometric style, pushing the MPAGD engine to its limits. There's a clever technique of using blocks with matching ink and paper values to create the impression you are walking behind walls. The effect is strong, reminiscent of games like Vortex's Cyclone.

Difficulty-wise, the game strikes the perfect balance. The pacing is not as frantic as, say Atic Atac, not quite a tactical as Cyclone. You have time to think and plan your approach and usually there are only Three enemies on the screen, a manageable number. There are numerous hazards to navigate. One enemy spawns a giant worm when killed, swords emerge from walls to slice at you (who would design a ship like this?), and other aliens look robotic and move predictably. There's even a face-hugger creature. It's not overly hard once you learn how to approach each problem, and soon you're able to explore the ship without too much stress.

My only niggle is that some rooms seem a bit pointless, with a couple of dead ends that don't add to the game or story. This is a very minor issue, but perhaps if these rooms had 'space coins' to collect for score, they would feel more purposeful. It hardly matters, though, because the game is great and I've thoroughly enjoyed playing it.

Finally, Rebel Wars has an opulent intro, with about ten beautifully animated screens that perfectly set the scene. You can see that every effort was made to produce a polished title. I probably should have mentioned this at the start of my review, but in space, no one can hear the editor complain, probably. (Ground Control to Jamie - come to my office please - Ed)



Things are about to get hairy

My review for this one could be summed up in one word, "ditto"!

Having heard Jamie's opinion on the subject, all that's left for me to do is parrot what my colleague has said about Rebel Wars' slick intro, great graphics and perfectly pitched gameplay.

I enjoyed this one a lot, and was surprised to be confronted by a different goal each time I started a new game. Apparently there are over 360 different mission combinations, so that should keep everyone busy through the long winter months.

In keeping with Mananuk's previous games, Rebel Wars has a playability to match its style and you never feel overwhelmed or hard done by as you explore the ship while blasting the varied enemy types. The game is a cartographer's dream, and one that those of us who are mazeophobic can enjoy getting lost in.

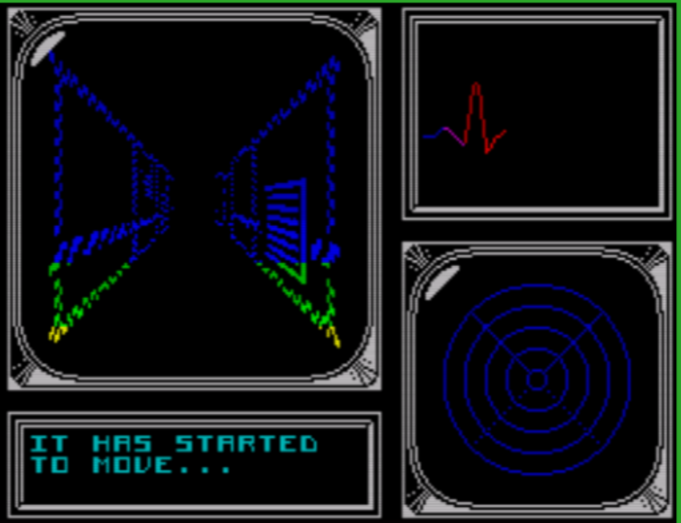
The only downside is that I can't use my "Rebel Wars? More like Rebel Snores" line I came up with in case it wasn't any good. Sadly, it's a corker.

Xenomaze

Red Zebra

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44712

Free



IT HAS STARTED TO MOVE...

Like a teenager at 11:30 on Saturday morning

The Xenomaze gameplay can be summed up in one sentence, which I'll just go ahead and plagiarise from the manual: find the exit and avoid the monster!

The manual also says it's inspired by a certain sci-fi franchise. It doesn't go into detail, but I'm going to go out on a limb and say it might be Alien... or possibly Mac and Me. It's also inspired by the old Speccy classic 3D Monster Maze. Now, I've never played that, and I've always wanted to - so, for the benefit of this review, I'm going to boot it up now to see how the two games compare. Hold on a tic!

I'm back! Having now played 3D Monster Maze, the games are very similar. If I had to choose a winner, I'd go with Xenomaze. It has better graphics, smoother gameplay, better sound, and the tracker adds a layer of tension that I just didn't feel playing Monster Maze. BUT... maybe I'm being unfair. Obviously, 3D Monster Maze gains a lot of points for being the original 3D maze game and for inspiring the likes of Wolfenstein and Doom. It also gains points for having a rather charming ringmaster introducing the game, who's jib I really liked the cut off. I'd obviously feel differently if I grew up playing Monster Maze. But I didn't. So I don't.

Back to Xenomaze! You find yourself on a spaceship - and the architect who designed the layout should never work again. The alien only moves when you do, and you're equipped with a tracker in the bottom-right corner that shows you when the alien is nearby. The screen offers up helpful messages now and again, such as "The Alien has started to move" and "You are being hunted.". There's a lovely graphic of your heartbeat as well, but I don't think it serves a purpose.

I can easily imagine my eight-year-old self playing this in my bedroom - surrounded by Masters of the Universe action figures and Dannii Minogue posters, getting absolutely terrified. Now, in my mid-40s - those Dannii Minogue posters replaced with Gustav Klimt art (my wife's, and not the originals unfortunately), and the action figures replaced by empty bottles of scotch (all mine) - the effect seems somewhat watered down. Still, I have to admit the alien did make me jump the first time it jumped out on me.

After a few attempts of nervously navigating the maze I managed to escape with 48 steps taken, which, chance would have it, is exactly the same amount of steps from my bed to the scotch cabinet.

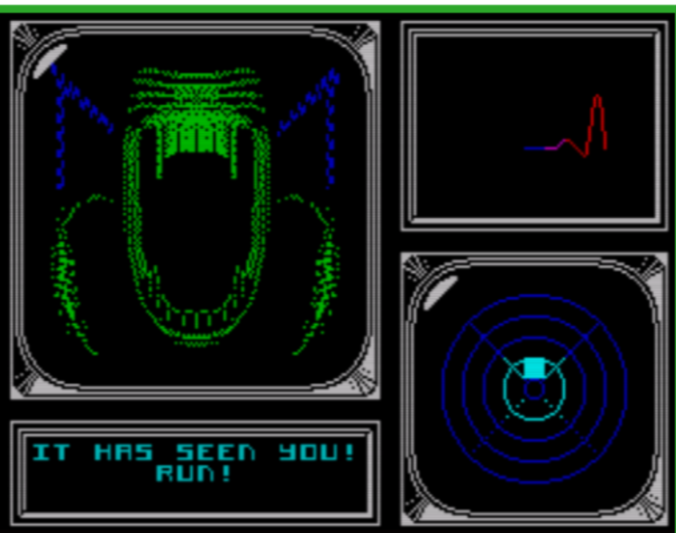
In summary, more faithful to the franchise than Alien Earth… and scarier too!

If you're the sort of gamer who still feels a jolt of panic at the memory of a pixelated T-Rex, in a certain 3D Monster Maze, then Xenomaze is your next essential fix. It takes that primal fear of the world's first survival horror and brilliantly repackages it as a straight pure shot of Spectrum-era adrenaline.

The premise is familiar and terrifyingly effective. Trapped in a maze of stark corridors, styled to evoke the industrial, claustrophobic feel of the USCSS Nostromo from the film Alien, your goal is to find the exit. The only problem? You are not alone.

Movement is grid-based but feels incredibly fluid. The animation as you turn and move through the corridors is nothing short of excellent. It creates a convincing first-person perspective that pulls you directly into the nightmare. You'll find yourself racing forward, terrified of the chase, the beep of your trusty motion tracker a constant and unnerving companion.

Where Xenomaze excels is in its authentic Alien atmosphere. The sound design is pivotal. Your most vital tool is the motion tracker. The iconic scanner - with its pulsating wave that will accurately reveal the alien's position as a blip – is incredibly well realised.



IT HAS SEEN YOU! RUN!

I feel like that warning could have been sooner

Replacing the T-Rex of the original with the Alien is, of course, the main draw. Seeing the creature for the first time raises your heart rate to a quickening pulse. Of course it will never beat the original T-Rex, but it works perfectly well. And when you die there is a moment of white noise on the screen that is reminiscent of the sequel, Aliens. All in all, a fittingly brutal reward for failure.

Ultimately, Xenomaze shows its genius by knowing what to keep and what to adapt. The core gameplay is intact, but the vibe is Giger, gloom, and Middleborough's industrial hinterland in space. A masterclass in respectful reinvention. It takes the flawless foundation of 3D Monster Maze and dresses it in a skin that feels at once nostalgic, fresh and deeply faithful to the films. Like the original, it's a lot of fun in short blasts and well worth a look.

Now, please excuse me - my motion tracker's just started beeping...

AstroDrone

Steve Tyson

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44671

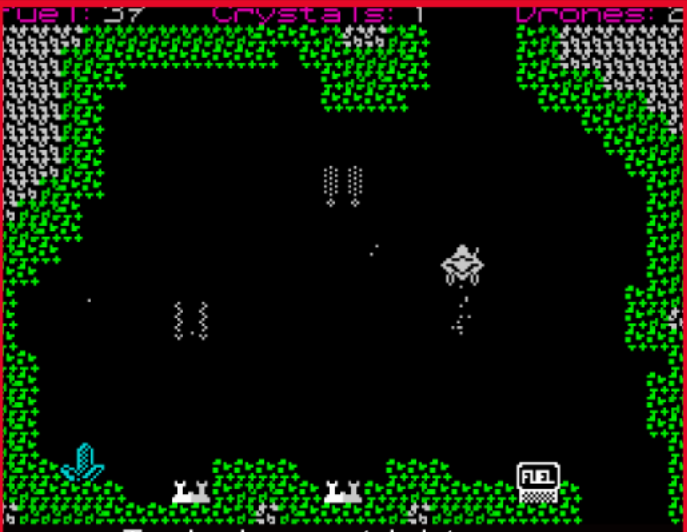
Free

A drone, as you may know, is something boring which goes on and on and on. I don't know if anything comes to mind when I say that. Okay firstly - Oi! How very dare you! I'll let it slide for now, but your nan was right about you, you are a cheeky monkey. Secondly you know I meant things other than my good self.

Moving right along. In this case the drone in question is more a type of sci-fi version of the thing your weird Uncle Bob uses to photograph neighbours in their gardens, a flying robot of sorts, a lunar lander if you will, because in essence this is a classic Lunar Lander type game.

Working your way through a vertical labyrinth you must avoid baddies and potshots taken at you by keeping yourself aloft, and controlling your descent, by the upwards impulse of your jet thrusters. This is a balancing act; too much thrust and you pile into the ceiling, too little and you fall to the floor. Either option is messy. Perfection is achieved with the correct balance of thrust to keep you flappy-birding your way around the maze, collecting prizes as you go.

Now personally I have a real soft spot for this kind of game, as the original text based lunar landing game was a favourite "type-in" game of mine from those old David Ahl books. Latterly of course when graphics became possible I used to play Moonlander on a PDP-11, but of course my all time favourite version was the Atari arcade Lunar Lander using vector tech similar to Asteroids. That's the version I've played the most, and obviously Gravitar which came later on. But of course the main version I played at home was Thrust from Firebird on the Speccy.



Turning base metals into green

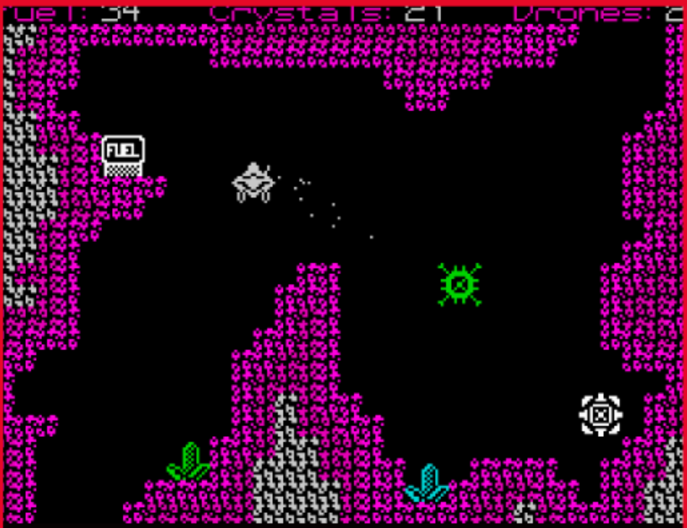
I get the same feeling from Astrodrone as I got from Thrust. The game mechanic is such that you really have to learn it. You have to get the controls singing like a nightingale, and every movement is intentional and controlled. This is not an easy skill to master, and I confess in the time I played this game I was only just getting the hang of it. But I could see that if I gave it another 4-5 hours or so of my time, and if the crushing defeat after crushing defeat didn't extinguish my will to continue, I would get better and actually come close to mastering it. Maybe.

Astrodrone is not an easy game, it's fair to say, but it is one which has potential for hours of enjoyable if challenging play. I look forward to a time when I can play with someone else watching. I'm old, I embarrass easily.

If videogames have taught us anything about asteroids, it's that their walls are deadly and gravity is vindictive. They also contain nuggets of ore that more often than not will power your broken down starship.

I really took to this game. One of its strengths is that you can play it several ways, and make your own challenges as you improve. First challenge is to reach the end, that's a 'soft' finish. Then you can build up to collecting 40 crystals for a qualified finish and a congrats screen. Then it's up to you: not lose a life, not collect any fuel, collect every crystal, complete it while a loved one hurls pebbles at you—the sky's the limit.

Like Phil, it brought Thrust & Lunar Lander to mind, and also Deep Core Raider. However it's not a clone—the physics are different and it's more action packed. As it turns out I did play for about 4 hours, so I booked the village hall for people to watch me play it, with tickets at £5 a pop. Nobody turned up. Not even my Auntie Edna. Ho hum.



Esso's upped its security

Astrodrone has the feel of a budget release or covertape that punches well above its weight. Only it costs nought pounds & noughty nought pence and you get some killer AY into the bargain. (Don't) buy it

Floppyverse

JuanGM

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45005

PWYW / $2

Phil failed, and the world is destroyed. GJ Phil.

It's the year 3088, and a checksum collapse has wiped out almost all solid-state memory in the Milky Way! I don't know exactly what that means for Earth. I don't even know what it means at all - but it sounds serious, so something obviously needs doing A-SAP!

As you'd expect - the fate of humanity rests in the hands of a little robot: FLP-82, the hero of the game. FLP-82's task is to roam each level collecting floppy disks and carrying them to a data terminal.

Not so easy as it sounds. FLP-82 has only a limited number of moves available. Press up and the little blighter shoots off in that direction like a whippet until you change course, each turn shaving a move off your total. Use all your moves and poor FLP-82 loses a life. (I can't keep calling him that, so henceforth I'll refer to him as Phillip - which is a lovely name for a robot).

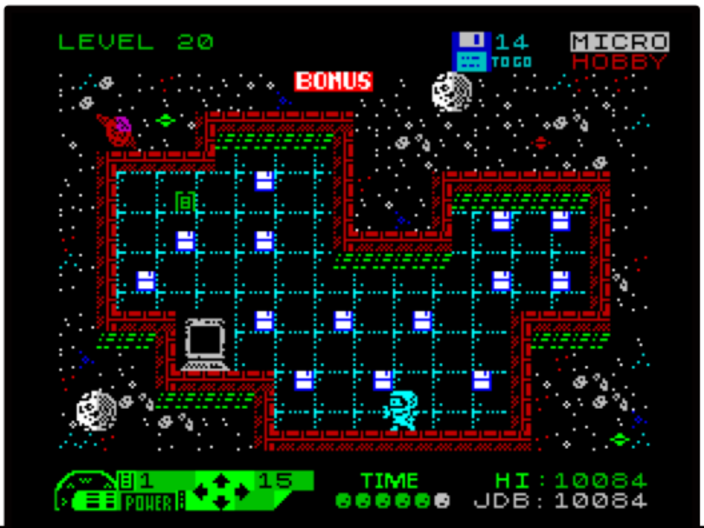
Scattered around the levels, making Phillip's job even harder, are numerous pitfalls and monsters - ranging from facehuggers and glowing red skulls to a creature who looks a little bit like Slimer from Ghostbusters.

The first level is easy as pie and serves as a gentle introduction. I actually completed it quite by accident whist I was still figuring out the controls! But don't get too comfortable - The difficulty ramps up nicely as you progress, and by around level 20 things start getting properly buggerish. There are 30 levels in total, with a few bonus rounds thrown into the mix - which serve as an oppurtunity for stocking up on some much-needed extra lives.

I really enjoyed this! Made with ZX Spectrum Game Maker and Boriel BASIC, it's nice to see something a bit different to a generic platformer. It's also highly replayable, with each level scored based on how quickly you finish and how efficiently you use your moves. This is a game that makes you use BOTH your brain AND your reflexes - which are the very best kind of games if you ask me!

If I had one gripe - not even a gripe, really, more of a suggestion - I'd love to see a password system. There are a few levels I'd like to replay (having completed them, but not efficiently enough for my own satisfaction), and I'd rather not start again from level one every time.

All in all, One of the best Speccy games I've played recently. Bravo, JuanGM (and Philip!)



Looks like my bedroom when I had an Amiga

Well - this was a nice surprise. When I loaded up Floppyverse and clocked the ZXGM logo I was expecting some standard platforming fare. Not that there's anything wrong with that you understand, some of my favourite games are standard platforming fare. It turns out however that Floppyverse is more puzzler than platformer and as well as being a good example of a versatile use of the games engine, it's a damn fine game.

JB has described the mechanics nicely, so it's whizz around the screen, grab the discs, avoid the nasties & get to the PC to complete the level.

The fact that the limited number of moves you have at your disposal is one of your main enemies, means you need to use your cerebral powers to plan out a route on each screen. However this one isn't just for Poindexters, you need super quick twitch style reflexes, especially for the later levels that are downright nasty.

There's something satisfying about a game that gets the difficulty curve right however and you are rewarded for repeated play as you sculpt out each screen. Unlike JB however I found things getting "buggerish" around level 8 or 9 when the killer doorways came into play.

The music in this one rounds out a very slick package, and, whisper it, but this could be the best ZXGM game yet!

Partuza

Ignacio Escribano

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44711

Free

Don't you open that trap door! You're a FOOL if you dare.

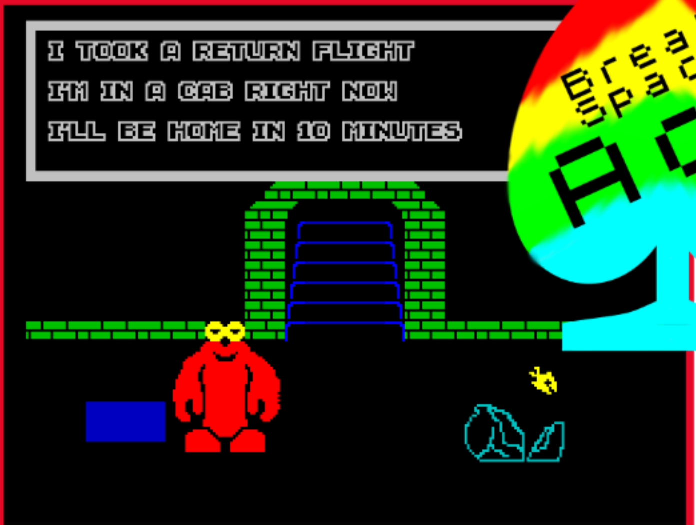
What we have here is an entry in the Bytemaniacs 2025 Contest that may have flown a little under the radar, but is an extremely impressive flip-screen platformer/puzzle game programmed entirely in compiled BASIC.

Partuza wears the influences of the late Don Priestley firmly on its sleeve. You play Gregory (no not a sleepwalking baby with a lost clock) who is a sort of plasticine blob monster and completely not at all Berk from Trap Door. For starters, Gregory is red and Berk is blue, are red and blue the same thing? No! So, case closed.

Gregory's story begins with his wife having to tend to her ill mother, leaving Gregory to invite the lads round for a big party. Just like one of those Facebook parties you get Netflix documentaries about however, his pals trash the place and poor old Greg wakes up with the mother of all hangovers and 10 minutes to tidy up the place before his wife gets home and all Hell breaks loose.

You join our hero just as he gets a literal wake up call from the Mrs. You must put 6 items in order and tidy 3 items by the time she gets home or you'll be out on your big red backside.

The game has wonderfully cartoony graphics, I mean just look at those tasty screenshots. The animation is smooth, however it does plod along a bit. If you have the ability to crank up the speed then it's literally a game changer, if you're running it on a Next and you turn it all the way up to 14 or 28 Hz it remains perfectly playable as you zip around the mansion.



I TOOK A RETURN FLIGHT
I'M IN A CAB RIGHT NOW
I'LL BE HOME IN 10 MINUTES

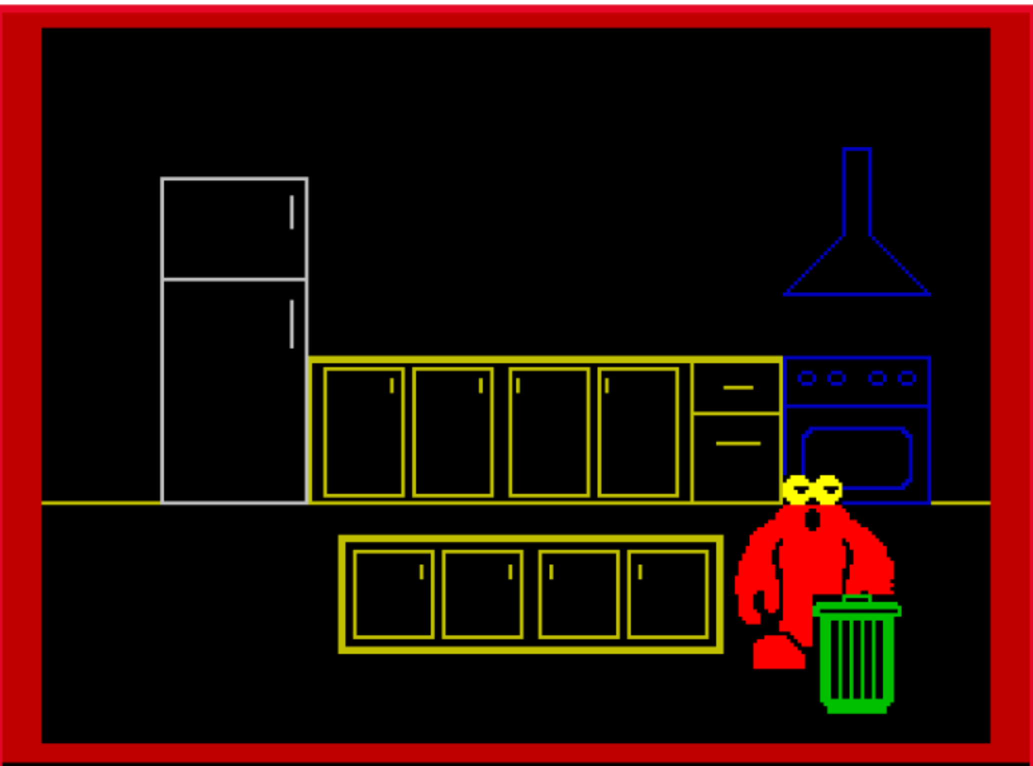
Uh oh, you're in trouble.

In a game this smooth, it seems churlish to criticise the music, but you'll be grateful for the fact that the game gives you the option to turn it off & stick on a CD of classic kids TV theme tunes.

I have to admit to having a frustrating time with this one, with not being able to place the objects where I thought they should go. ("Why can't I put the empty bottle in the bin in the kitchen?" I scream as I pick it up and set it down again moving pixel at a time.) That was until Dave took pity on me and told me that you are supposed to use the "grab/put" key to place the objects not the "drop" key (that's just for setting down objects to pick up something else!) What a silly Gregory… I mean Berk I'd been!

The satisfaction you get when you get to tick an item off your "to-do" list is tremendous and once you have figured out where everything goes it is a truly wonderful feeling.

So, fancy playing Don Priestley's Flunky but don't want to have to serve the Andrew formerly known as Prince? Then this is the game for you. The fact that it's in compiled BASIC just makes it all the more impressive.

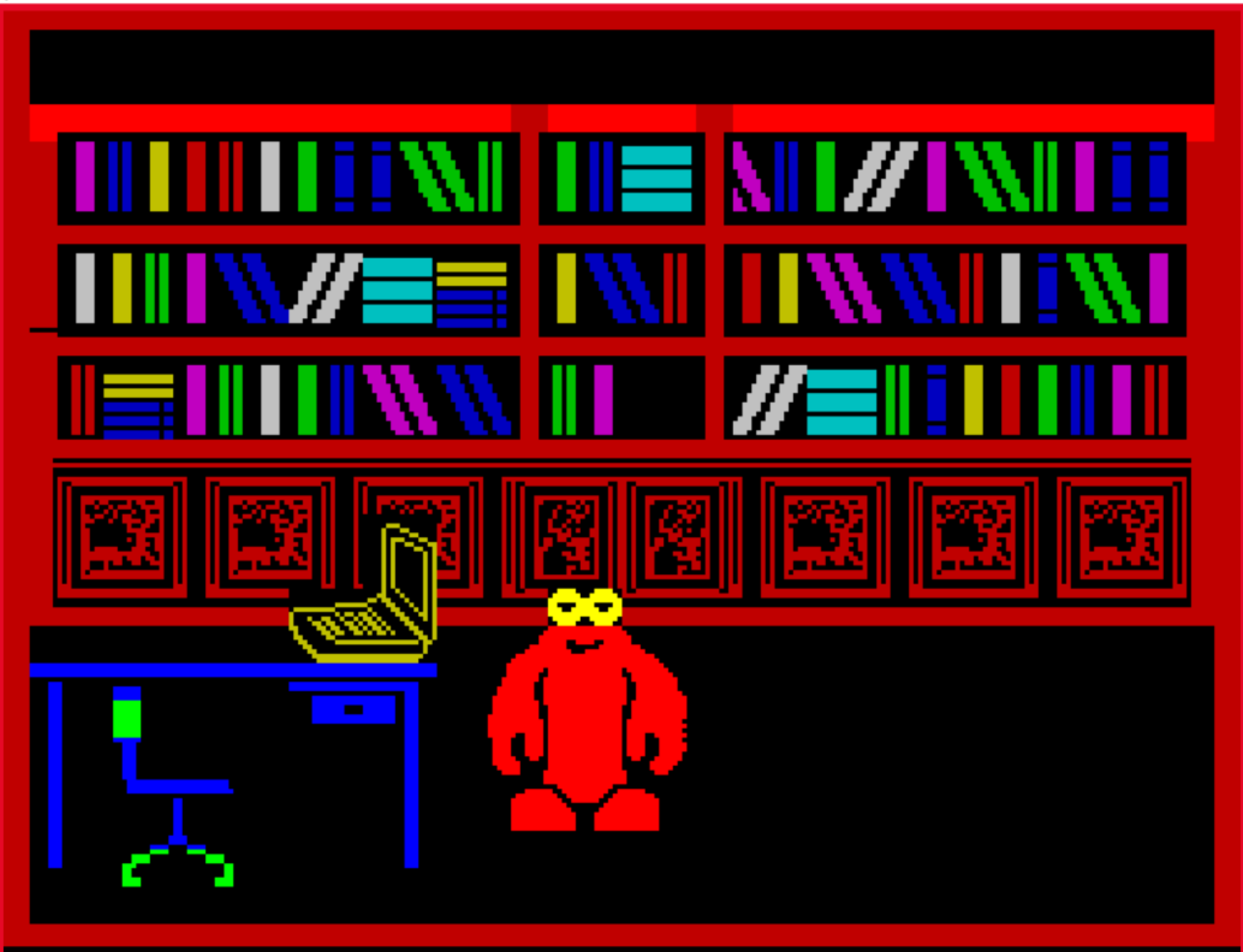


Get in the bin. No, really - get in the bin.

Translations differ as to exactly how debauched a 'Partuza' is, but in any language we can say that it's a party that got a bit out of hand. We've all been there—waking up hungover and covered in mince, and no matter how bad you feel the mess has to be cleaned up. It's even worse if there's guilt involved, as is the case with Gregory, the degenerate lobster version of Berk and protagonist of this game.

I'm so happy to see this layered graphics effect in action. It works so well that I've been wandering around testing it, which is a bad strategy in a game that's pretty tight against the clock. The best bit is walking up the stairs, disappearing behind a wall, and reappearing, bit by bit at the top, still truncated by columns. We haven't seen many, if any, games like this since the great Don's in the late eighties. And given that Gregory is 52 pixels tall—exactly the same as Trapdoor's Berk—he's big enough to get away with looking smooth despite moving in 8 pixel jumps.

Partuza is much more than a programming exercise mind—it gets the important stuff right too. There are no unfair solutions, no red herrings, and no lethal hazards (unless you count your wife when she gets home). So it's just you and a handful of objects to bin or tidy, one at a time, against the clock. The author has laid everything out so that you need to be efficient, but not robotic to complete it. Reaching that stage should take a few replays, but with a 10 minute time limit and such gorgeous presentation that is no problem at all.



It was Mr Red in the Library with the laptop.

I don't know what ZX Dave gets up to at his parties if he's waking up covered in mince – and I'm not sure I want to know. But they certainly sound a lot more rambunctious than Gregory's. Waking up after a huge house party with only six items to clean up? Sounds more like a quiet night in to me. Compare that to Jet Set Willy's house after his shindig – now that was a party.

This game really was a blast from the past. I hadn't revisited any Don Priestley games for a long time, not since completing Popeye many, many years ago. It's a simple affair: pick up all the items and put them back in their correct places before the timer runs out. It's a fantastic example of what can be done with Boriel BASIC, and it absolutely delivers that nostalgia fix we all crave from time to time. I can't see much reason to revisit the game once it's been completed, but it certainly put a smile on my face for half an hour. It has a great sense of humour, and I'd love to see this author produce more – and perhaps larger – games along the same lines in the future.

I played the English version - but there's still quite a lot of text that hasn't been translated from Spanish. For example, a notice pops up after you put the laptop back on the desk, and the statistics screen is also in Spanish, although I think it translates to how many items still need to be thrown away and repositioned. Of course, it could mean something entirely different – the only Spanish I know is "Una cerveza, por favor".

One final thing. There's nothing wrong with being a bit house-proud... but a wife who kicks her husband out of the house and forces him to live on the street just because she comes home to find a single clock out of place seems a bit unfair. Poor bloke – no wonder he feels the need to let off some steam with a gravestone in his lounge every now and then.

Roojliek

Jim Blimey

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44776

PWYW / £1.99

To say I love Roguelikes is an understatement. They are my favourite genre of all time. Rogue, Moria, Umoria, Angband, Cave Noire (Gameboy). I have seen things you people wouldn't believe. A horde of plasma hounds, moving so fast they appeared as flowing lava. An Umber Hulk tearing through the very fabric of the dungeon around me, hurling boulders and shredding stone. I've fought gelatinous cubes whose acid turned my legendary equipment to dust. I've vanquished fallen angels in the bowels of hell.

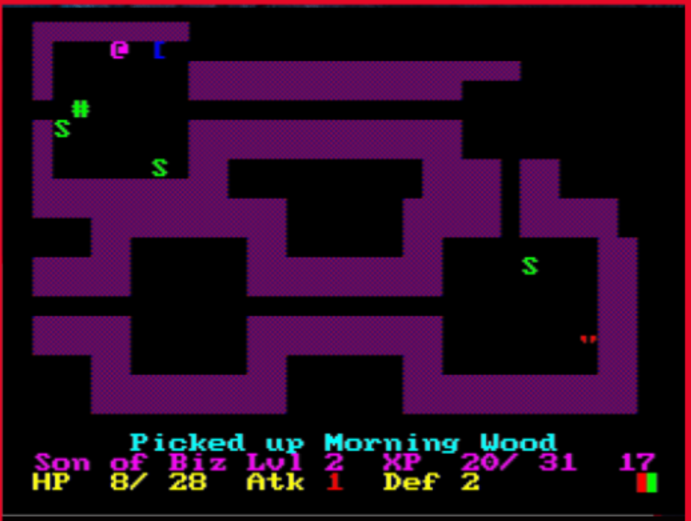
And once, as a Level 50 Archmage who had faced down liches and dragons, I died on Dungeon Level 2. Poisoned, blind, and enfeebled, I was gnawed to death by a low-level rat when I had run out of options. I died again and again. I opened a door. The game text simply read: 'It breathes. You died'. No fire. No monster. Just a disembodied, existential verb, the only clue to my mistake. Fifty hours of progress, erased by a grammatical phantom.

So, does Jim's new title, Roojliek, live up to the legacy of this foundational genre? By the broken biscuits of Zeus, that is what we are here to find out!

First things first: Roojliek is a fun and whimsical poke at the genre I so pompously just described. I suspect Jim is all too aware of its weird quirks. He pokes fun by filling his dungeons not with epic loot, but with rotten eggs, beige bricks, and "morning wood." The satire is clear.

However, the joke can push a little too far. Part of a Roguelike's thrill is the excitement of finding genuinely good loot. Roojliek is often clogged with far too many useless items, turning exploration and inventory management into a chore rather than a curated adventure. The risk/reward of picking things up is skewed heavily towards "why bother?"

This touches on a deeper point: any great Roguelike is fundamentally a game of risk management. This is where many modern Roguelites (and Roojliek is no exception) stumble. In classic Rogue, you always have the option to retreat, to go back up the stairs to safety for a lie-down and a mug of Bovril. But just like Margaret Thatcher, Roojliek is a lady that's not for turning. There are, critically, no 'up' staircases. Once you are on a level, you have to complete it. If you haven't got the tool for the job, you're screwed. Death often feels like a matter of luck, not skill.



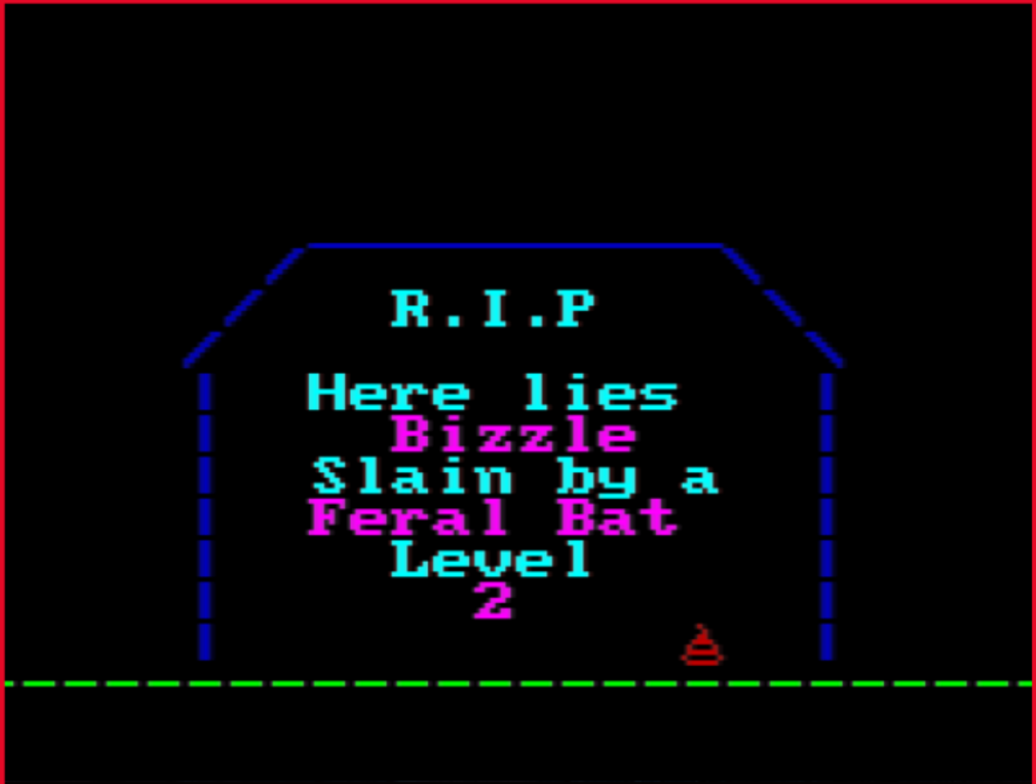
```
Picked up Morning Wood
Son of Biz Lvl 2  XP  20/ 31   17
HP  8/ 28   Atk 1   Def 2
```

Slimes give me Morning Wood. Oo-er.

The other key departure is that it's not strictly turn-based. Enemies move in real-time, either randomly or on patrol routes. This initially surprised me, but I came to love it. It adds a tense, arcade-like element that makes sneaking through the dungeon, learning movement patterns, and avoiding tough foes a thrilling puzzle in itself. This is where Roojliek truly starts to feel like a fresh take on the genre.

Despite my purist gripes, this game is excellent. Jim has done something incredible: an 18-level dungeon crawler that is slick, exciting, and interesting to explore. I love its graphical choices; the font and colour palette are wonderfully considered and enhance the experience. The arcade elements add a faster pace perfect for a quick blast or a deeper dive.

The game it most reminds me of is the Game Boy's Cave Noire, a cult classic that brilliantly streamlined Rogue-like design into a mission-based format perfect for its 8-bit hardware. Roojliek performs a similar feat for the 8-bit Spectrum. And frankly, by echoing the best Roguelikes of that era, I can't give it higher praise.



```
R.I.P
Here lies
Bizzle
Slain by a
Feral Bat
Level
2
```

I can't believe my Morning Wood was so ineffective.

A lot of the appeal of Rogue-likes is that they wind up being story-generators. Your heroes die in frequently ironic and comedic ways, just due to the high levels of randomness. You read the wrong scroll, and now you're cursed. You find a wand that illuminates the dark dungeon with daylight - and your vampire character crumbles to dust. Once, in Dwarf Fortress, my whole mine scrambled to rescue a miner from a deep chasm before he died of thirst, only to accidentally dig into an underground lake, drowning him. And so on - every rogue player can pull out a handful of favourite stories, mostly about how their plans went badly wrong.

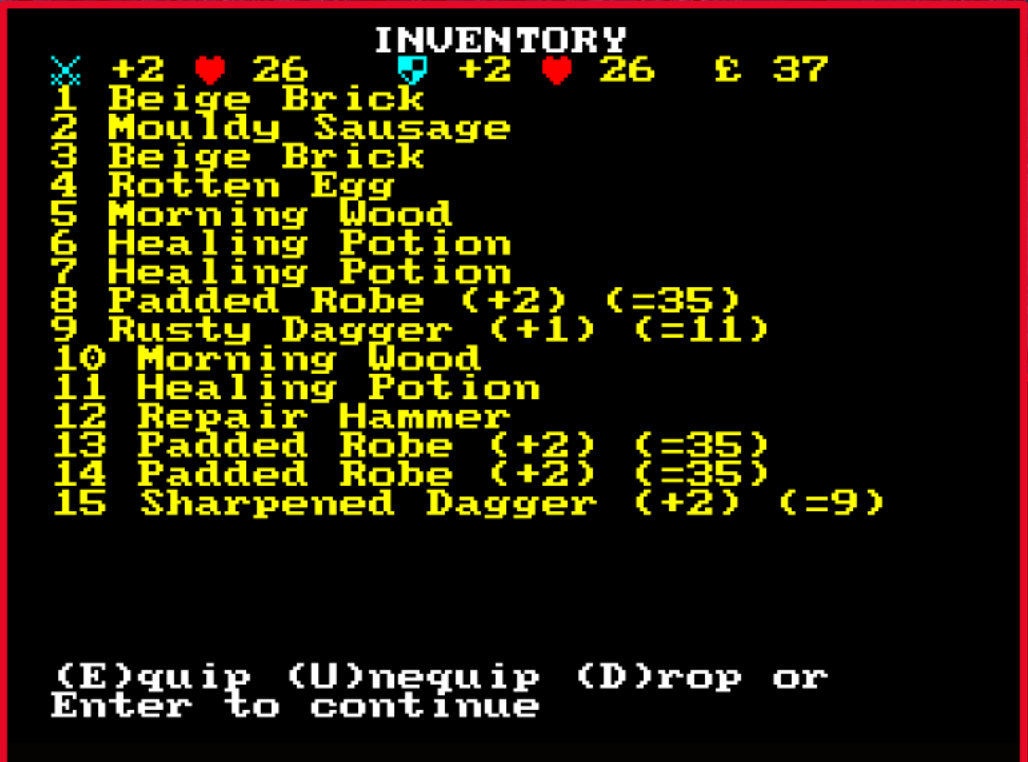
Things go wrong in Roojliek too, of course. Too many rats. A zombie when you least need one. Words to fill you with dread : 'You are not alone', when all you want to do is sleep on this bedroll you found to get some health back.

The basic mechanics are pretty good. I could do without using cursor keys, of course, a lesson that I thought most Spec-Chums had taken on board in the 80s. There are just a few buttons additional to your movement, which are sensibly mapped to initials - H for health, I for inventory, But the movement is fine and the the map reveal works great. The creatures nipping in and out of the shadows is a nice effect, especially when you're looking to avoid them rather than farm for XP. All in all the real-time movement is a nice addition, even if it's not a traditional Rogue feature.

It makes up in part for the main weakness here - a lack of variety. As mentioned, the best rogue-like stories are when it goes wrong unexpectedly, but with the vast majority of loot that you find being useless trash, and no options other than linear improvement of weapons and armour, there are few chances for the kind of emergent crises that make the genre work at its best.

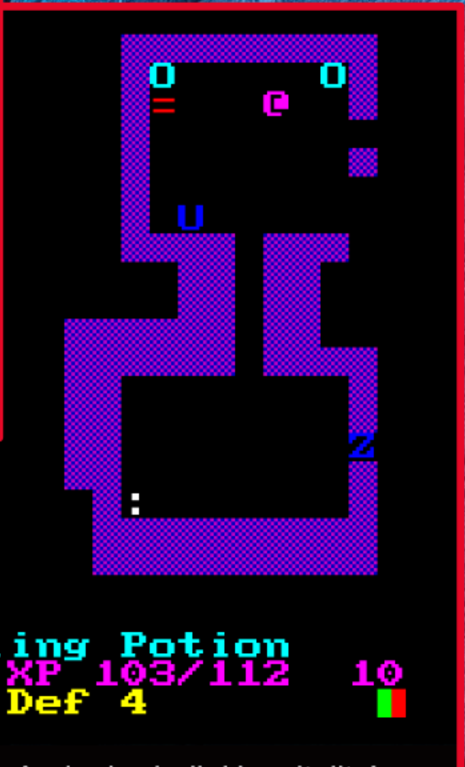
Which all sounds as if I don't like it : I do. There's plenty of depth, quite aside from the 18 dungeon levels - the creatures you face all have their own behaviours, which can make them easier to deal with (or avoid). Goblins can be penned in by dropping some junk in their path. Rats seem especially good at detecting traps, so maybe let them run around for a bit. And so on.

So maybe it's a little feature-light, maybe it's not going to become an obsession like it could do. But it's in 48k, so it's a little unfair to expect too much. If you're a new-comer to the genre, it's a great introduction. It's tough, and could easily draw you in. And if you does, look forward to a long tough journey to beat it.



```
               INVENTORY
⚔ +2 ♥ 26    ⛉ +2 ♥ 26   £ 37
1 Beige Brick
2 Mouldy Sausage
3 Beige Brick
4 Rotten Egg
5 Morning Wood
6 Healing Potion
7 Healing Potion
8 Padded Robe (+2) (=35)
9 Rusty Dagger (+1) (=11)
10 Morning Wood
11 Healing Potion
12 Repair Hammer
13 Padded Robe (+2) (=35)
14 Padded Robe (+2) (=35)
15 Sharpened Dagger (+2) (=9)




(E)quip (U)nequip (D)rop or
Enter to continue
```

The Hammer only works on the Sega version, so carry spare stuff.



```
    Picked up Healing Potion
Mpk         Lvl 5  XP 103/112  10
HP 40/ 40   Atk 4  Def 4
```

That's a Blunderslug and 2 Ogres. And a bedroll. Hospitality!

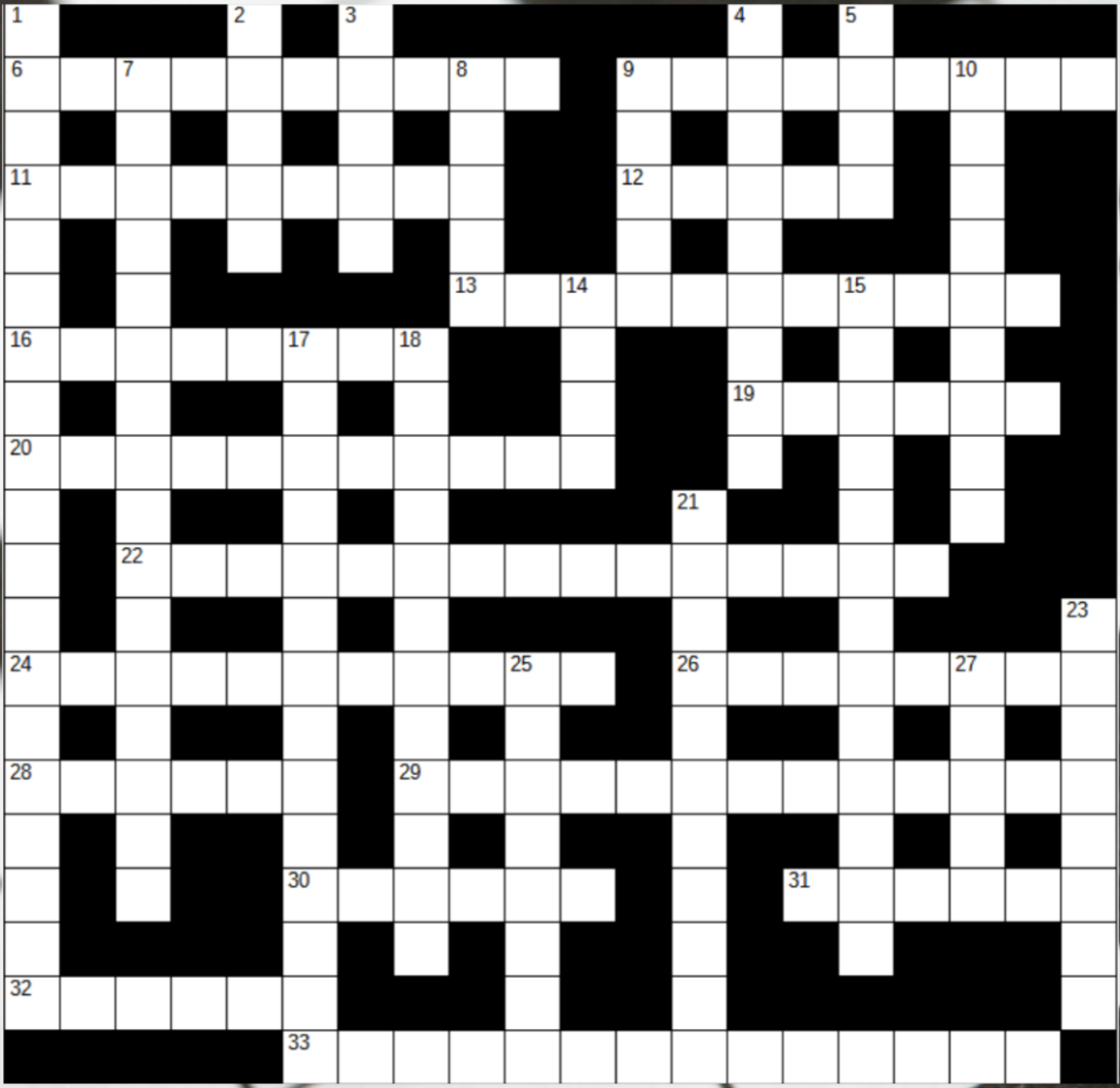
Issue Four Not-A-Bore Brain Chore
(aka The Crossword)

Winter! Blizzards! Gales! Your power's out and you can't play Spectrum games!
No worries.
Simply acquire a pencil and solve Greencard's latest puzzler by candle light.
How romantic.

And overleaf, the answers to the Issue 3 crosswords. See? We didn't forget.

Across:
6. Spanish Breakout clone from the mid-00s (10)
9. Fry a piece of a potato (4, 1, 4)
11. 2020 Tir Na Nog-alike (9)
12. French maze/puzzler sounds like its own publisher (5)
13. War strategy brought to us by 27 Down (6, 5)
16. Mythical Irish fairy, from Russia (8)
19. The "C" in A.T.A.C. (6)
20. Obscure type-in, bringing E.T. closer to Earth (5, 6)
22. Exciting escapades with Paul Daniels (5, 10)
24. NES classic whose arcade original saw a port to the Spectrum, called Shadow Warriors (5, 6)
26. Sad arrow? (4, 4)
28. _____ Rover, train station simulator (6)
29. Graeme Souness's Speccy offering (6, 7)
30. Obscure MicroHobby covergame (6)
31. Publisher of games based on TV game shows (and one popular soap) (6)
32. Poseidon has at least enough planets for a football team (6)
33. Exciting arcade port with it's fair share of ups and downs (8, 6)

Down:
1. Romanian fortress (13, 6)
2. The _____, a poem by Edgar Allen Poe, and a pretty good Sherlock Holmes text adventure (5)
3. Fairly prolific Speccy publisher, and an epic space adventure (5)
4. Totally rad C64 skateboarding game which was slated for release on the Speccy, but never arrived (5, 4)
5. Not Silver or Fire (4)
7.1984 management sim from Silicon Joy (5, 4, 7)
8. Clumsy mascot of a popular British snack, rides a motorcycle (5)
9. Could be Day or Point (5)
10. Important part of a country or region (9)
14. Could be ATP or De Force (4)
15. Fourth Protocol-style strategy game (10, 3)
17. Human _____ _____, Speccy tournament fighter inspired by Street Fighter (7, 7)
18. A special job given to 24 Across, and another arcade that was ported to the Speccy (with a shorter name) (5, 6)
21. Celestial uninvited (4, 7)
23. Ants tour? (8)
25. Recent release from Amikosoft (8)
27. _____ Press Software, later became Grandslam Entertainment (5)



Finally, some answers.

So, did you solve the Issue 3 crossword? You did? Then you can skip this page entirely. Grats.

Still here? You utter failure. Answers below, if you must.

B	E	A	N	B	R	O	T	H	E	R	S	■	B	O	T	A	N	I	C
R	■	L	■	■	A	■	■	■	U	■	■	■	A	■	H	■	■	■	O
E	L	I	M	I	N	A	T	O	R	■	C	A	S	T	E	L	I	A	N
A	■	E	■	■	D	■	R	■	E	■	A	■	I	■	M	■	M	■	T
K	I	N	G	D	O	M	O	F	K	R	E	L	L	■	O	■	O	■	I
S	■	K	■	■	M	■	O	■	A	■	S	■	I	■	J	■	L	■	N
P	■	I	N	D	I	A	N	A	■	■	A	■	S	T	O	R	A	G	E
A	■	L	■	■	Z	■	■	L	A	I	R	■	C	■	N	■	■	■	N
C	A	L	L	M	E	■	■	A	■	■	■	■	O	R	T	R	E	A	T
E	■	■	■	■	■	■	A	D	I	D	A	S	■	■	W	■	■	■	A
■	R	■	M	■	M	■	■	D	■	■	■	P	A	N	I	C	■	■	L
M	E	G	A	S	E	R	P	I	E	N	T	E	■	■	N	■	■	■	■
■	B	■	R	■	R	■	■	N	■	■	■	C	A	R	S	M	A	S	H
D	E	A	T	H	C	H	A	S	E	■	■	T	■	■	■	A	■	■	A
■	L	■	E	■	S	■	■	C	■	■	■	I	■	■	■	C	■	■	R
■	S	■	C	■	■	N	■	A	■	■	■	P	I	Z	Z	A	B	A	R
■	T	■	H	E	R	E	S	V	I	L	L	E	■	I	■	D	■	■	I
■	A	■	■	■	■	X	■	E	■	■	■	D	■	O	■	A	■	■	E
T	R	A	N	S	I	T	■	■	■	V	I	E	T	N	A	M	■	■	R

CRASH Live

Sloany went on holiday to Kenilworth. Arguably, not the most popular or attractive destination in the world, except when there’s a top-notch Speccy convention on.

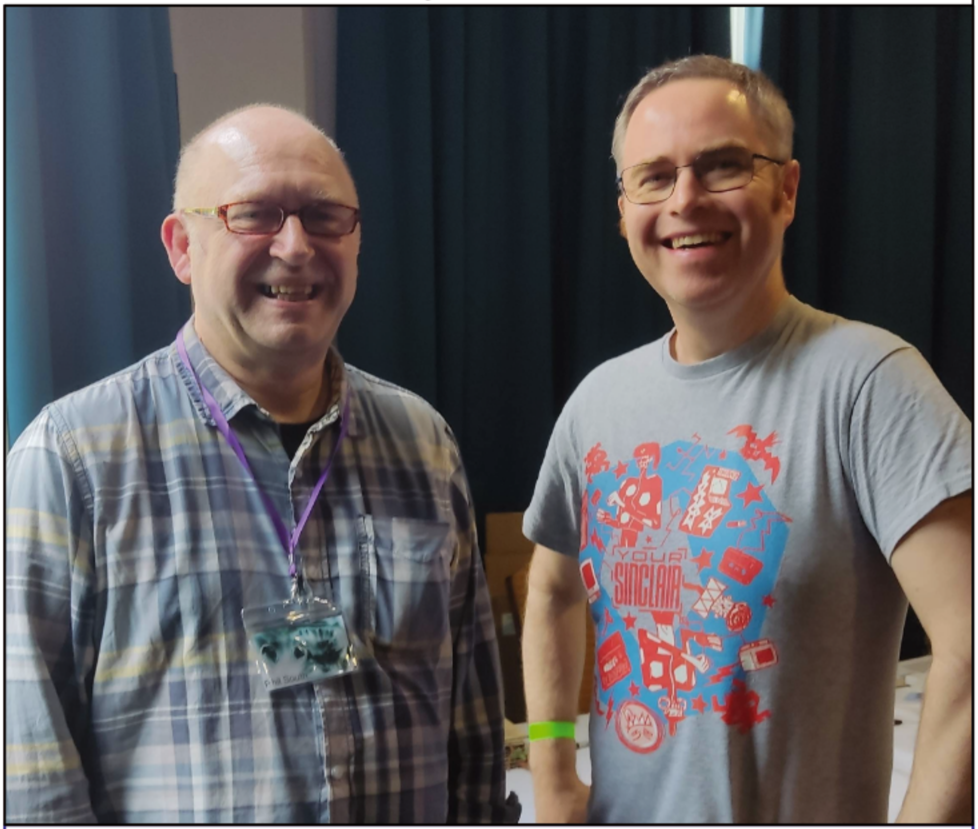
Text by David Sloan, Photography by Peter Mulholland

The Plan

Back in the day there there was plenty of rivalry between the magazines devoted to our favourite home computer. Crash, Sinclair User and Your Sinclair were constantly taking pot shots at one another, perhaps most famously illustrated by the infamous "Unclear User" cover which featured in the August 1985 issue of Crash.

These days however we are all much older and (hopefully) wiser, with peace and harmony reigning in the world of Speccy mags. Having said that, when I paid a visit to our pals over at Crash one rainy Autumn weekend, I snuck out of Break Space towers under the cover of darkness, lest I incur the wrath of Mpk, especially after my FREEZE-ZX moonlighting!

Crash Live has grown to become the highlight of the Speccy calendar in the UK and is now firmly established in the Kenilworth Holiday Inns, its home of 3 years. The 2025 version saw it expand from a one dayer to the full weekend, allowing for even more talks from the great and the good of the Speccy scene.



Break Space represent : Phil and Sloany on their best behaviour

So the plan was to rock up on Friday night with my good buddy Peter "Manic" Mulholland, anticipating a packed weekend of Speccy shenanigans. Storm Claudia had other ideas however, causing a series of unfortunate events that would make John Cleese’s character in Clockwise look like he was having a regular commute to work. After that false start, 3 airport visits, and 3 hours sleep it was time to stress test the extremities of the hotel's “All-you-can-eat’ breakfast before tackling the event itself.

The expansion to two days certainly took the pressure off a bit, but at an event such as this it's still practically impossible to do everything you plan to. So what was on offer?

THE MAKING OF
AVALON &
DRAGONTORC
WITH STEVE TURNER

Torc Talk

The Talks

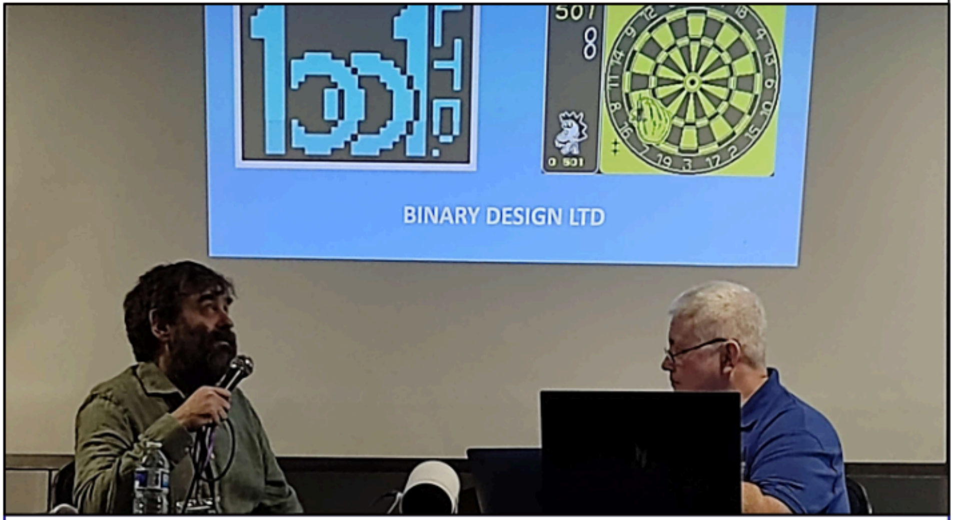
The talks are always a huge highlight and this year there were some absolute corkers. The author of “On the Spectrum” and “ZX Dreams/ Nightmares” and all-round knowledgeable guy Grahame Mason was in fine form, carrying out hosting duty for most of them, with Mike James of the Retro Gaming Roundup podcast & Midnight Brew’s Alan Turvey doing a great job of hosting the others.

In the first talk I caught, Steve Turner (ably assisted by pal Andrew Braybrook) took us through his programming journey, with the key focus being the groundbreaking fantasy adventure Avalon and its sequel Dragontorc. The Graftgold guys are always superb value and had some fascinating insights into the games’ origins as well as showing off Steve's new game, Deepest Blue (https://steamdb.info/app/3998150/) and talking about Andrew's “Monster Molecules” project.

Gremlins

Following this there was a superb chat with Gremlin Alumni Peter Harrap and Ian Stewart. Focusing largely on the development of both the company and the wider computer games industry, against the socio-economic background of the UK in the 1980s. Anyone who has read the excellent “A Gremlin in the Works” will be familiar with Gremlin lore and it was awesome to hear first hand the story of how Peter created Monty Mole and his “difficult follow up” games. There was a personal highlight for me when they used a picture of my late uncle Kenny working at FC Computers in the early 80s.

The next day we got to see the lovely Ste Pickford reminisce about the highs and lows of his career creating games alongside his brother John. He was thoroughly engaging and seemed a bit bemused by the level of interest in his past work. I understand this was one of the first times he's done a talk at an event like this, I sincerely hope he does many more in the future.



Ste Pickford on the oche

Following Ste was a glorious Speccy mags panel where Crash’s Nick Roberts faced off against Phil “Snouty” South of Break Space (and, I guess, Your Sinclair) fame. Many’s an anecdote was shared about working for these hugely successful and influential publications.

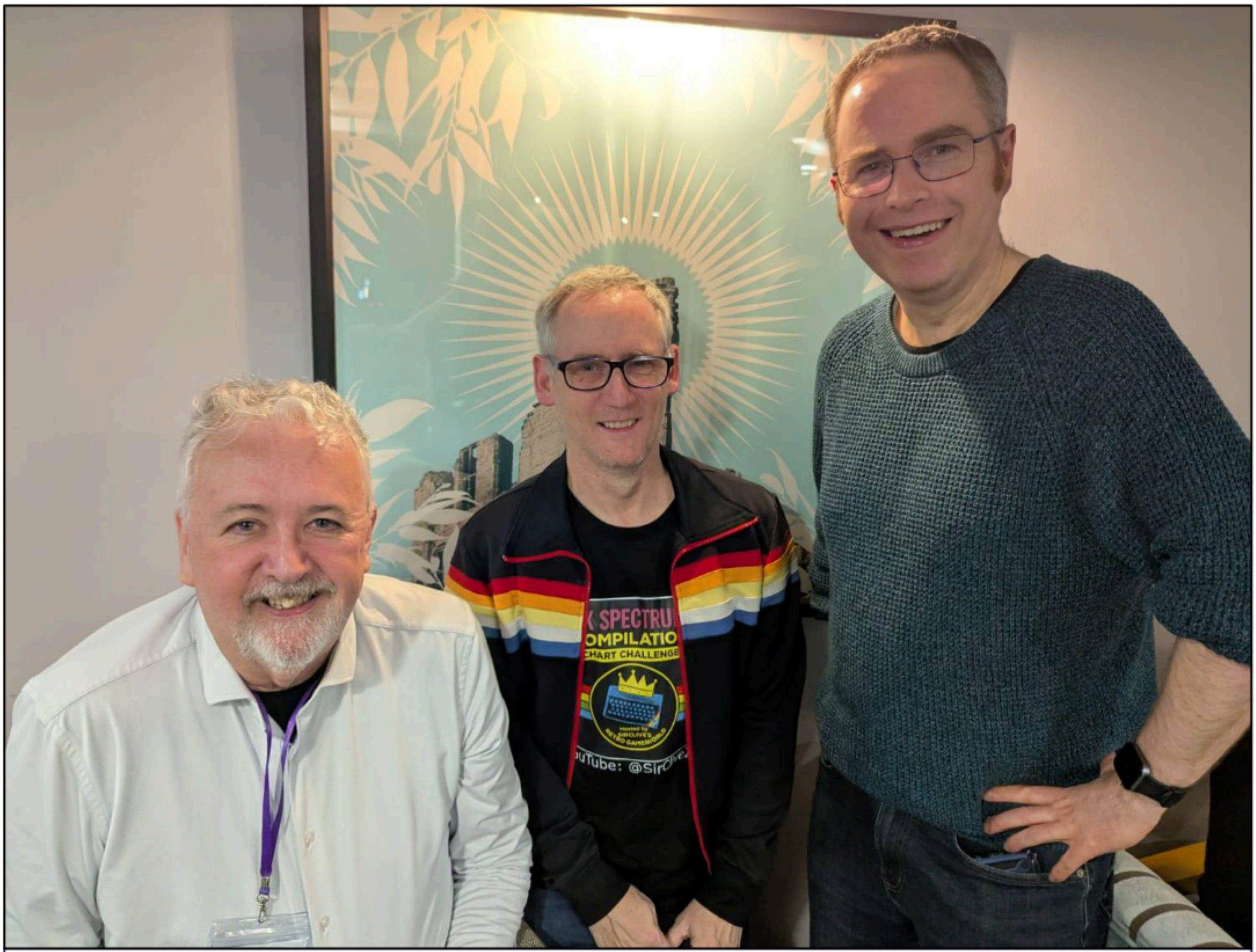
Next up was the evergreen Malcolm Evans, and it was an absolute joy to hear him fondly recount memories of creating hits like the seminal 3D Monster Maze, Knot in 3D and Trashman.

The final talk we were privileged to see was an odd pairing, which saw my new best friend Sir Kevin Toms* on a panel with “Fat Worm Blows a Sparky” creator Julian Todd. Both were hugely engaging and entertaining and rounded off a fine weekend very nicely.

Unfortunately we didn't attend any of the other talks but they are available online, thanks to Crash’s Paul Davies filming the lot and sticking them on his YouTube channel. Check them out at https://www.youtube.com/@Hermski This means I got to enjoy Incentive software’s Ian Andrew and Paul Gregory talk about setting up the company and creating classic games such as Splat! and the groundbreaking Driller respectively. I also got to see Mike Folin recount tales of the many arcade conversions he's been involved with (including my favourite, Bubble Bobble).

*See Sloany’s blog for more red-hot Toms goss.

The Spectrum Show & the updates from the Next team are also online for folk to savour.
In previous years the talks have overrun and there have been issues keeping everything on track. This year however they were like a well oiled machine. With the event being spread over two days, there was a little more time between talks to allow that wriggle room needed for them to stick to the programme.


Kevin Toms and Sloany flanking…Jesus Christ himself, apparently. (aka Gordon Sinclair)

The Merch

Away from the talks there was much to catch the eye of a wandering Spec-Chum around the various stalls. It was great to see Beanhed and Andrew McCloud displaying the frankly stunning Immortal Joysticks, the joysticks are extremely robust beasts that play every bit as good as they look. There was also plenty of reading material that could be picked up, from the guys at "The Gaming Newsagent" as well as the Fusion Retro Books and Graeme Mason's ZX Dreams stalls.

CRASH
Live! 2025
BREAK SPACE
DURELL
FAT WORM
FOOTBALL MANAGER 2
HIT-FAN
Moley Christmas
Someone's been autograph hunting…

If you were in the market for some bespoke Speccy merch, the guys at RetroBitz had you covered with mugs, clothing, mouse mats and all kinds of knick-knacks. I managed to pick up a rather natty Break Space fridge magnet, I mean how could I resist? The super friendly Ronnie Simpson also had a stall, which displayed his custom Next and "The Spectrum" covers, game racks and bespoke USB sticks etc, alongside his wife's impressive fused glass gifts. I just had to pick up one of his game racks, they're just too adorable.

Midnight Brew's Alan Turvy also had a stall where he was selling the latest Midnight Brew collections, comprising of physical copies of top tier Speccy homebrew, with more Aces than a Las Vegas casino.
Ant Harper's stall was selling tonnes of Speccy software and hardware for extremely reasonable "Ebay "Mega Rare" busting" prices. I picked up a copy of Bubble Buster for a paltry £7, I could have happily spent a fortune padding out my collection if I wasn't so concerned about running out of retro space at home.

Technoshed were there too, with an array of the very best Next games for you to load up on in advance of the hopefully imminent arrival of those KS3s.

Rounding out the merch stalls, RGL were selling their "The" range of reproduction machines and teasing white "The Spectrums".

SCORE:00000360 WANTED:035 LIVES:00
DREAMTIME MONTY
NEW GAME
CONTINUE GAME
OPTIONS
JUKEBOX
AND HUNDREDS OF ROOMS TO TEST
© 2025 RUSTY PIXELS/SPECNEXT
SONY

A new Monty game? Whatever Next.

The Machines

In addition to there being plenty of stuff to buy, there was an impressive array of tech on display from the very dawn of home computing to the brand spanking new. All manner of regular and modded Spectrums were available to try out, including a roomful of Nexts showing off the latest and greatest brand new software and some sneak peeks at WIP games. There were loads of games on show that I didn't get a chance to play as I was too busy chatting, but I had a bit of a go on the new Monty Mole game for the Next, which looks to be a perfect tribute to the little fella. I also tried out a really fun new Next title with an aquatic theme and a cool mechanic called " Go With The Flow".

01 00063530

Go-Go Bunnygun running on a VERY snazzy Speccy

Jason Railton was showing off what I believe is, and I say this without hyperbole, perhaps the greatest shoot 'em up I have ever played on the Spectrum in the shape of Go-Go Bunnygun. When this one hits Break Space towers I get the feeling we'll all be scrapping for the opportunity to review it like Costco shoppers over a £20 air fryer on Black Friday

The main foyer housed Adrian Sinclair's utterly gorgeous Next arcade machines as well as some brand new Vectrex Minis sitting alongside the original models. There were all manner of non Speccy related computers and consoles too and there was even a room dedicated to arcade machines all set on freeplay. For me however, the star of the show was the prototype magenta Next that was being carefully guarded by the boffins of the Next team and what a beautiful machine it is.

The People

This fancy tech is all well and good, but what I dig most about events like this is the people. Walking about you get to meet Spectrum fans, classic coders, homebrew heroes, traders and those who are simply retro-curious.

Crash Live is the kind of place where you can bump into Kevin Toms in a corridor and before you know it you're having a pint with the man who invented the football management genre and discussing everything from food intolerances to the Dutch public transport system. I want to make

Jonathan Cauldwell beamed in on the teleporter pad.

mention of everyone I chatted to at the event, but I'd be afraid of missing people out. It was awesome to finally meet Jonathan Cauldwell though and thank him for his game creation tools that have enabled so many wonderful games to be made for the Speccy. I also really enjoyed catching up with Ric "PuddyCAD" Lumb, 100Tinsoldiers, Gary Cordery-Davis,Chris Clebin"Owen, Gordon "Sir Clive" Sinclair, Wayne "Retro" Robbins, Andrew "Merman" Fisher, Lee "Chops" Stevenson, Rich "Tufty" Hollins and Anthony "Northern Games" Scarfe. Oh look, I made a list after all! If I chatted to you & missed you out SORRY, blame the lack of sleep.

The Entertainment

On Saturday night the talks room was converted into an impromptu concert hall, as Project X provided some post show rocking out. Rattling through an impressive array of classic covers from the likes of Queen, Pink Floyd and David Bowie. There's something very special and unifying about a bunch of nerds rocking out and letting loose after a long day Spectruming.

The Verdict

As I slunk back to Break Space towers late on Sunday evening, remembering not to stand on the 3rd step lest its creaks wake up the Boss, I reflected on a rather splendid weekend and the Herculean effort that must've gone into it from all the organisers and exhibitors. The event has really evolved in 4 short years and I'm not sure if it has outgrown its current Kenilworth Holiday Inn home, but I certainly hope it returns in some form next year.

I thought about how good it was to put faces to names of friends made online and the great and good who've contributed so much to the Speccy scene over the years. I thought how important it was in this day and age to make these connections and what a positive effect it has had on my own mental health as we head into the dark winter months. Sometimes it's not just about the high scores, it's the Spec-Chums we make along the way.

The new Vectrex was on show. Arms for scale.

Malcom 'Trashman' Evans

Phantomas BASIC

Mike-Vk

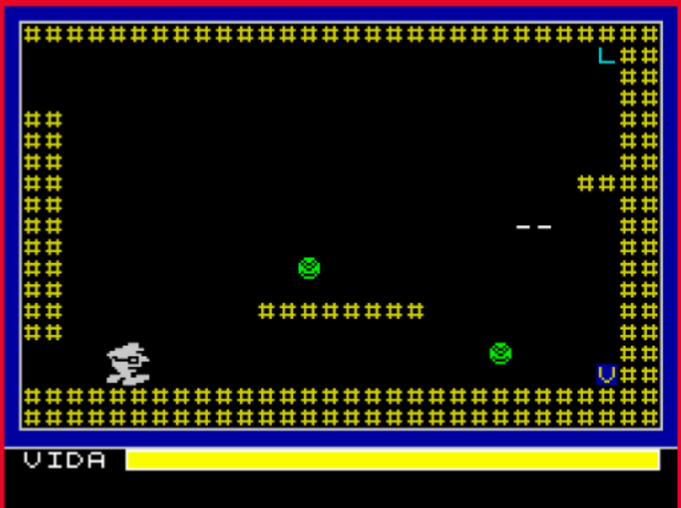
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44789

Free

I should mention that Ed has vetoed the phrase “a love letter to” due to overuse, and I’m a good lad, so I will do my utmost to avoid it. Shame though, ‘cos it really is.

It was only through researching this review that I realised just how big a deal Phantomas is to the Spanish scene. Fred gets a look in of course, but it’s not dissimilar to the British (and any right thinking person’s) fondness for Miner Willy. Phantomas appeared later than the crazed collier, being published by Dinamic in 1986, followed by an official sequel, and at least 11 fan tribute games. It’s probably the reason that so many Spanish games have two keys for jump—one for high & short, one for long & low. So if you’re not already familiar, it’s worth playing the original before you check out Mike-Vk’s version.

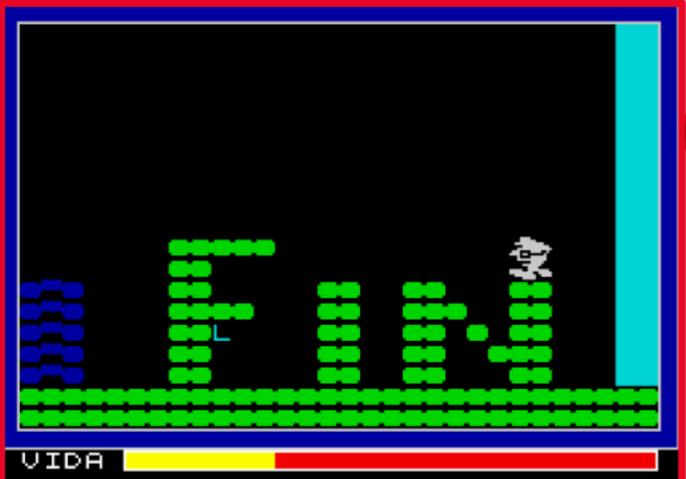
Phantomas BASIC is a slimmed down affair in comparison, not even using all the available UDGs, instead opting for ASCII characters for energy, jewels, levers, and moving platforms. I still think it looks pretty good, if more open, and with Phantomas sporting a more aquiline nose than his predecessor. It does play at a decent speed, which is good going for pure BASIC, especially as there’s gravity, collision checks, and several sprites for it to think about. The physics may be a bit weird, basic even, but most importantly they work. If you jump for a moving platform or over a baddy, you can predict the outcome and rely on it happening when you press a key. That may sound fundamental—and it is—but so many BASIC games don’t manage it.



A right old hash

It’s a relatively big game with varied screens, so it’s fun to roam around this mansion stealing gems and flipping switches. But there are a few issues: I’m not sure every object is accessible, and I broke out of the map a few times, returning to reality with a bump and a ‘Subscript wrong’ error. Should these bugs get fixed, this is a game I’ll happily play to completion.

Phantomas BASIC came 28th out of 32 entries in the 2025 Bytemaniacos BASIC competition. That doesn’t sound great, but it’s more testament to the quality of the entire field. It’s been a great year for original games coded in higher languages. Many of them, like this, are an author indulging a soft spot they have for a Speccy game of yesteryear. One might almost call it *una carta de amor*.

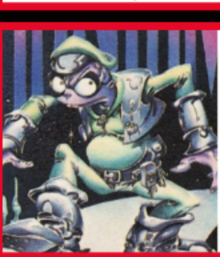


The final barrier

I’ve played quite a lot of sprightly, effortless 2D platform games this issue, and throughout 2025, but sometimes I miss the plodding, slow pace of the ZX81, or more specifically, ZX BASIC. André Baune is something of a master of this sort of thing, with his epic Yoogor. Phantomas BASIC reminds me a bit of André’s epic monochrome adventure platform game.

Phantomas is somewhat a mascot for Spanish Speccy fans as I recall, and this production celebrates his adventures in pretty good style for BASIC. Yes, you have to wait for the screens to draw, and yes, the controls take some getting used to. And when our hero moves or jumps, things tend to stop. But it’s what I call a puzzle platformer: because of how the controls work, it takes a while to get to all of the places that you need to get in order to collect the cyan Ls that our protagonist needs to collect; this actually represents treasure that Phantomas, as a liberator of wealth, want to borrow for no apparent reason. Though some of this is difficult, and might be impossible, to get to.

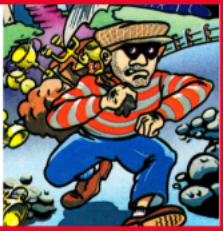
If you want a more sedate pace in your 2D platform games, this is for you. Learning the controls is the main obstacle really. Taking a while for each screen may bore some people. But for me, it’s all part of its charm. Someone of your gaming expertise will have this all sussed out more quickly than I did though. The icing on the cake is that the listing may be stopped, and the game logic therefore understood, if that’s your sort of thing. It is mine.



Phantomas was a big 1986 hit for the Spanish software house Dinamic, about a kind of intergalactic Robin Hood type.

Naturally, when Codemasters published a UK version, they switched him from his original alien persona to that of a regular old burglar on the box art. Well done, Codemasters. Absolutely Brilliant! Etc..

Coincidentally, Phantomas also makes a cameo appearance in S1ncLa1r C1ty this issue. Small world, eh?

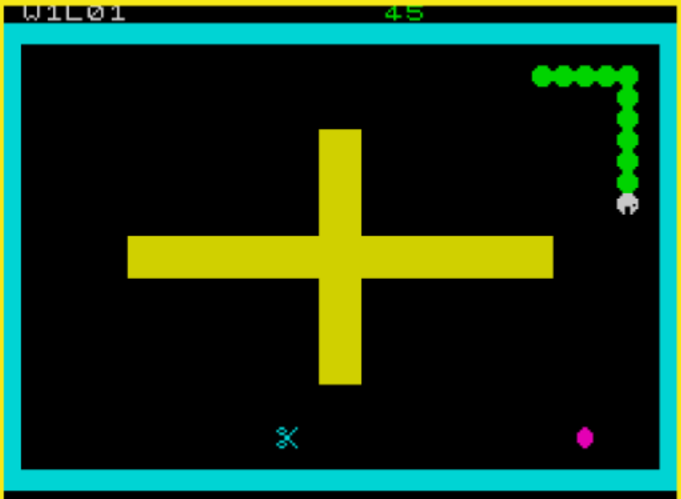


Pixel Python

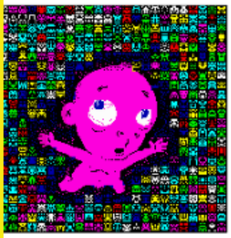
Wyesoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44662

Free



We found this level a big plus



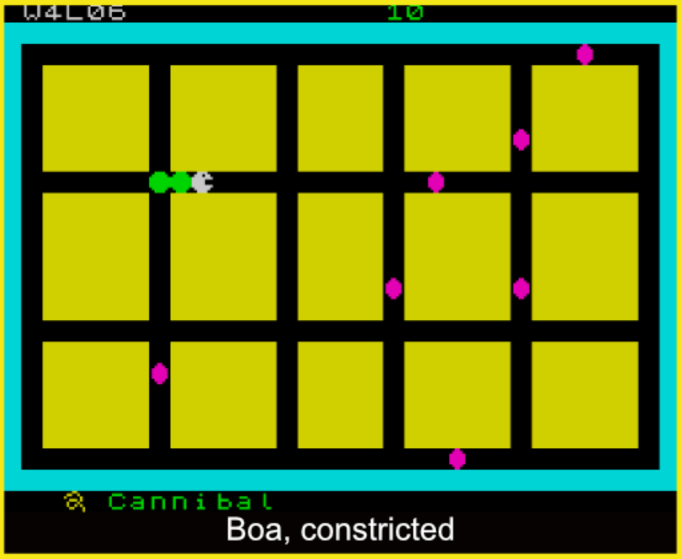
If you visit the central business district of your average British town, chances are you'll see an Aldi, The Works (man-marked by a Rymans), 2 or 3 chain coffee shops, a Boots, and a Tesco Extra. All of it along a red-brick pedestrian road that acts as a hostile holding area for the Wetherspoons after 7pm. It feels like everywhere is the same sometimes, and that's relevant to this review because a similar criticism is aimed at arcade clones like Snake. Is that true, and is Wyesoft's Pixel Python just another Snake?

No, as it turns out. Very little of it fits the standard template. Even the release was unusual, with the publisher coming seemingly out of nowhere in October, with 3 games made for the ZX-Spectrum, advertised on a website made for the 1990s. And Pixel Python is not just one game, there are 12 different tapes, each a variations on the theme. It's a bit overwhelming at first, not helped by the eccentric menu screen to choose the options. For example once you've worked out how to define the keys and choose 1 player, you'll probably find out the hard way that P is hardwired as the pause button.

However, once you start playing, it makes its mark on the genre nicely. The main variants are Fields, Ramble, Gauntlet & Tunnels, which range from classic open screen Snake to levels with extra walls, up to fully hemmed-in mazes. There's also Snake Pong and 'Snakeout', both of which are new to me. Such innovations are nice, but they do need a solid 'vanilla' engine as a base, and Pixel Python does okay on that front: you move in character squares, which is standard* and the keys are responsive enough. And they need to be because as you get longer you move faster than a Black Mamba in a Nissan Micra. It's mesmerising as you whizz by in a blur of green and white.

The bonus items are the best thing. There are loads, so read the instructions, which are nicely provided as both a .tap and a .txt. The ones that standout are 'cannibal' which allows you to pass through your tail, 'wraparound' for screenwrapping and 'switchback' swaps your tail and head end.

I think even non-Snake fans (so most of the Break Space office then) will enjoy this more than they'd care to admit. It's a mix of fresh ideas and thrilling play. So if Pixel Python is a British town, it's one with all the usual shops, but there's also a decent indy sector, a hipster beer shop, a modern art gallery and a Roly's Fudge Pantry. It's more Lincoln than Luton.



Boa, constricted

You know Snakes on a Plane? Now we have Snakes on a Spectrum. As second reviewer, I felt like a second rate Samuel L Jackson, in the lowest budget B movie remake imaginable. Forget expensive CGI serpents, and settle in for UDG Pixel Pythons.

After my colleague Dave's glowing review, I was eager to dive into WyeSoft's Pixel Python. It is immediately clear why he was so impressed. This is true to the classic Snake genre, while also boasting an almost overwhelming amount of content across 13 TAP files and eight inventive game modes.

The ambition here is undeniable. This is not just one game; it is an entire arcade of snake based experiences. Modes like "Snakeout," which brilliantly blends snake with Breakout, and "Snakepong" showcase a real creative drive to push the boundaries of a classic formula. The sheer variety, from classic field slithering to tense tunnel navigation, ensures there is a challenge for every mood.

While Dave mastered the menus with ease, there is a slight learning curve for the uninitiated. The initial encounter with the auto scrolling readme is a welcome, if brisk, experience – but is there a way to pause the screens? And yes, navigating some menus sometimes requires the Symbol Shift key, that emulator users might struggle with. These are minor hurdles, however, and once you are familiar with the landscape, there is fun to be had.

The game truly shines in its multiplayer focus. While some modes are best experienced with a friend and a joystick, the inventiveness on display means there is something snake based for everyone.

In the end, Pixel Python is a testament to the creative potential of the ZX Spectrum scene. While it asks for a few minutes of patience to learn its ways, it rewards you with a deep, whimsical, and endlessly creative package. It respects the heritage of classic snake while boldly innovating, making it an easy recommendation. My initial confusion quickly gave way to admiration for this sprawling, passionate project.

I guess I haven't had it with these monkey-fighting snakes on this Monday-to-Friday Spectrum.

---

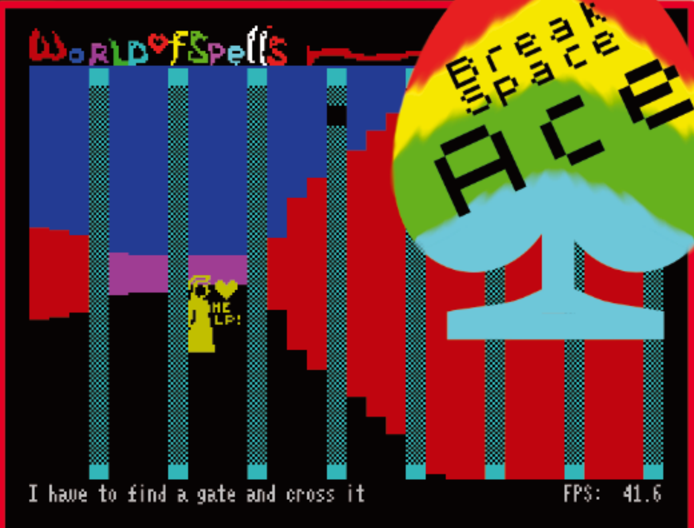
*in fact only a couple of games on the Spectrum have a smooth snake (and I don't an a member of the family Colubridae)

World of Spells

JT Krakow

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44603

$6 / £12



I have to find a gate and cross it FPS: 41.6

There she is, the inconvenienced Princess.

I'm not entirely sure how to feel about this. I should be delighted. Maybe even proud of the little old Spectrum still stretching it's capabilities. But there's a part of me that a bit angry. Where was this in 1985? Why did we have to wait until now for a game like this? This could have changed the landscape entirely - like how Jet Set Willy and Knight Lore inspired a thousand clones of themselves, this could have been like an 8-bit Wolfenstein inspiring a generation of early FPS games. iD wouldn't have stood a chance. But it didn't happen. What were we even paying all those boffins for?

But I'm gettng ahead of myself.

World of Spells is a First-Person Shooter, where you, as a wizard, have to explore a classic dungeon setting in order to rescue a princess. She has presumably been targeted by a revolutionary group protesting the royal family's excesses and the extreme income disparities of the national economy. The instructions don't specify, but let's go with that.

As a wizard, you only really have one spell, but it's a good one : you can blast out a series of fireballs. And you'll need to because there are a host of grumpy-looking ghosts inhabiting this dungeon, and they intend to do you harm.

It's a simple setup - on each level, you have to find the exit in the mazelike dungeon, shooting ghosts as you go. There is a map that you can switch on, like in Doom, if you need help navigating. And, just like Doom, you can play with the map onscreen, and it draws in a little path as you go. You can even get mugged by a ghost while you're looking at the map.

All of which sounds like a matter-of-fact breakdown of a pretty competent game. Which it would absolutely be, if it was not for one undeniable fact.

It's *amazing.*

Genuinely. You start it up, it's got a nice loading screen, and a very slick menu / attract screen, with 2D sprites rotating around a 3D pillar. Very nice, very promising. But then you get started, and it's almost as if someone's replaced your Spectrum with a 486 PC. The bright block-colour scheme reminds you of Knot In 3D as much as anything, but the engine - the smoothness of the movement, the rendering of the dungeon walls as you glide around with full FPS movement available - this doesn't remind you of anything. This is something else.

Controls are FPS style, with WASD, plus Q and E to sidestep, Y to shoot (once you've found your wand) and U to bring up the map. It's remarkable how natural it feels, having this alien genre for once on the Spectrum. It's just so well executed. There's an FPS counter, for Clive's sake, which appears to top out at an impressive 80fps. It's all too much. And that's before I mention that it's topped off with one of LeeBee's best, most hummable soundtracks.

Pushing through dungeons blasting ghosts could get repetitive, but each level adds a little extra something. Not puzzles as such, but additional gimmicks to open doors and the like. It's very nicely paced, with short but nicely escalating levels that keep the experience fresh. It's not very long, but that's not a criticism at all. It's nice to be able to finish a game now and again.

Are there rough edges? Yes. Sometimes the rendering glitches out temporarily, and sometimes the collision detection is over-sensitive. Level transitions are abrupt and sometimes confusing - you'll finish a level but not understand why, and you're already on the next level without realising what happened. Nothing show-stopping, but there's always room for improvement, even when you've blown the bloody doors off.

There have been a handful of games in 2025 that made jaws drop in the BreakSpace office : Cubix and Plyuk jump to mind. But World of Spells stands out for me as the most impressive of them all. While Plyuk doesn't look like a Spectrum game, WoS looks exactly like one, in screenshots at least. But when it starts to move, it looks like a dream. And plays like nothing else.

WoRLDoFSpells
Ice lake
7
11
I feel the need - the need for speed FPS: 80.6

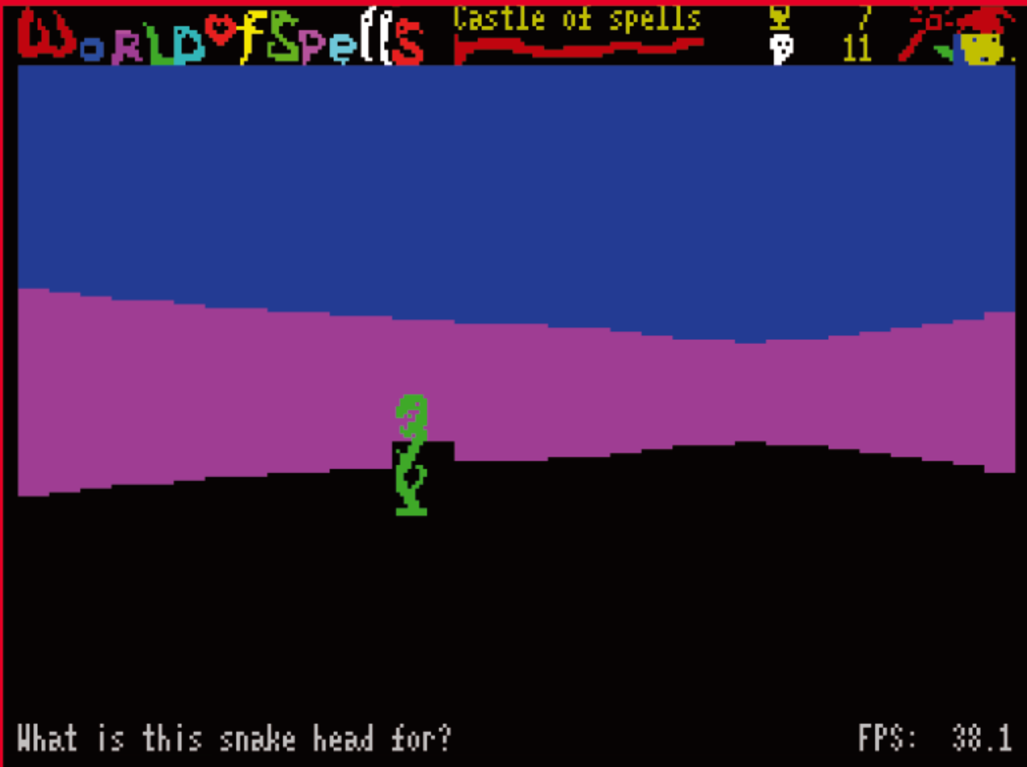
80 FPS! (While facing a blank wall, admittedly)

2025, what a year of Spectrum games. As I suggested elsewhere, there is a lot of quality. Even for games that don't quite hit every mark, they're still pretty damn good anyway.

Believe me when I say this is more than just pretty damn good; it's a definite Ace if I ever saw one. Probably as Ace as the rather sublime Cubix, and certainly as technically jaw-dropping.

What makes a good Speccy game in 2025? There's a bunch of tick boxes that I go through: sharp controls, good pixels, good presentation, a good back story (though in this instance, I got this thanks to Mpk's review). I didn't imaging that I'd be adding "fast, 3D, first person perspective" to this list, and yet here we are. Oh, but should we forget about Mervyn J. Estcourt's Death Chase from 1983? No, I don't think so, but this is much faster and feels more 3D somehow. Right, but is this a good Speccy game? Or is it just a technical demo that's good for five minutes?

Running through each locale with some gusto is pretty amazing, but what am I supposed to do? Reading Lord Mpk's review, I understand that there's some Princess to rescue, and I, playing as a Wizard, am the only one who can rescue her. Fortunately, a handy 2D map can help you locate yourself within the maze-like gameworld, as it's quite difficult to work out where exactly you are sometimes. Those more used to these sorts of 3D games might not be so lost so quickly. If you ignore the odd glitch as pointed out by Mpk, this is fun just for the novelty of it. Yes, this is Speccy running on only Z80 power at just 3.5Mhz.



What is this snake head for? FPS: 38.1

It's so the snake has somewhere to park its teeth, obviously.

In conclusion, I'm not sure if I've fully answered the question of whether this is just a good game, or a good playable tech demo. But maybe I may opine about what would make this a better game? For me, it would be a frame rate limiter, so if I could lock the frames per second to say 15, or 25, so things move at a more consistent pace, I think that'd slightly improve in the playability department, which, I guess is only a marginal improvement.

To sum up then :
Perfect? No.
Jaw-droppingly impressive? Yes.
Fun? Yes.
Ace? Absolutely, and worth every penny.

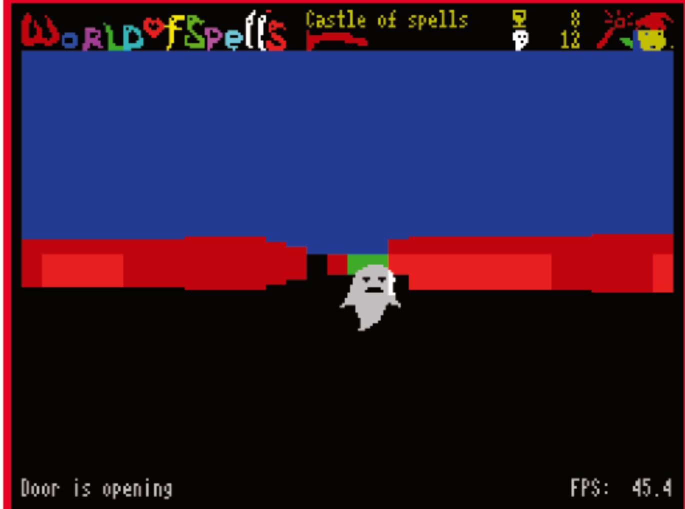
Confession time, I'm a very two dimensional person. I don't mean I lack emotional depth, I mean I've always struggled with 3D games. I feel the big 3D gaming boom of the 90s really left me behind and it wasn't until "retro inspired" games became popular that I fell in love with gaming again. Hell, even the Ultimate isometric games were too fiddly for me.

So it's with a bit of trepidation that I booted up World of Spells, the thought of FPS games always triggers getting my backside handed to me on GoldenEye flashbacks.

Now I don't know if it's because of the familiar, friendly Speccy colour palette; the distraction of the technical wizardry involved with making a Speccy run at a speed it's no right to run at or Lee Bee's atmospheric music…but I really enjoyed this!

The controls are responsive, the difficulty is spot on and behind everything there is a really well designed game. There's even room for some humour, What's not to love.

At this rate maybe I'll dust off my PC and take another look at this thing called "Doom" that the cool kids are talking about.



Door is opening FPS: 45.4

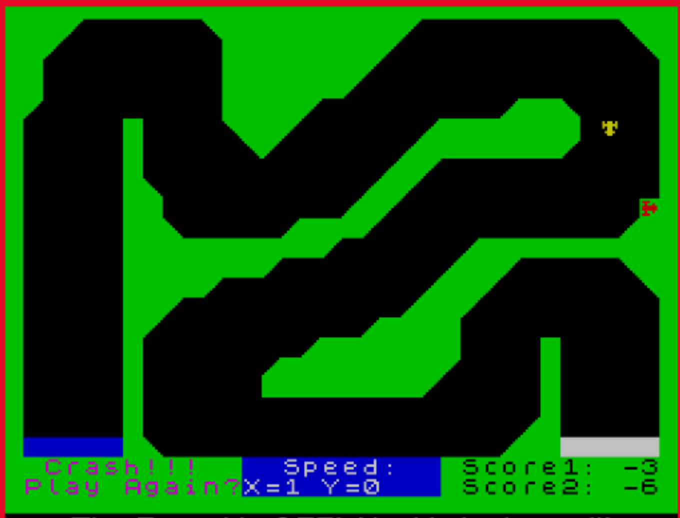
Who ya gonna call? A wiz-ard!

Speed Race

David Magalhães

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44716

Free



```
Crash!!!          Speed:     Score1:  -3
Play Again?X=1  Y=0          Score2:  -6
```

The Ferrari is OFF! Alesi is in the wall!

"Speed Race" was a two-player-only car racing entry in the Bytemaniacos BASIC competition, where it placed last—32nd out of 32 entrants. Presumably, it didn't even make it past the first corner before flying off into the brush. Upon first play, I immediately understood why: the controls are unusual, to say the least. As a colleague from BreakSpace Towers aptly put it: "It's got a kind of inertia, but in BASIC, and as if designed by a madman."

In its own way, this is actually kind of cool. Once you realise the car operates with two independent velocities, the logic, sort of, begins to make sense. At first, I thought the experience would be much better as a single-player game, but that misses the point entirely. This is actually a very well-considered two-player board game with a racing theme. The main issue isn't the game's format, but the fact that I don't have any Spectrum friends to play it with.

Thankfully, Mpk explained how to play. A clarification entirely missing from the official instructions. The system works like this: you have an X-speed (positive for moving right, negative for left) and a Y-speed (positive for moving up, negative for down). Your car moves that many squares each turn, and you can adjust each velocity value up or down by one at the start of your turn by pressing the corresponding button. For instance, Q gives you -1x, +1y, while W applies +1y. Pressing S (or J for player two) maintains the previous values. To paraphrase my colleague: these controls were indeed designed by a madman.

The trick is to avoid going too fast, as slowing down takes considerable time, and you must constantly keep both directional velocities in mind. This makes the gameplay feel more like a complex boardgame than a traditional racing video game.

The resulting challenge is unique. When speeding into the first turn and pressing D to "turn" right, it doesn't adjust your vertical speed at all. It just adds horizontal speed on top. Since you need to transition from moving up the screen to moving down, that shift requires several turns of preparation, forcing you to slow down much earlier than you'd instinctively think. Consequently, the system bears very little obvious relation to real-world physics.

However, once you get the hang of it, Speed Race is actually rather fun. That said, each car has nine buttons to control its direction, meaning that to properly review the game, I had to learn 18 buttons - nearly half the Spectrum's 40 keys. Worse still, on a corner, one wrong move sends you skidding off into trees, deadly soft verges, or some other game-ending peril.

Still, I can appreciate the thought that has gone into this. There is a madman's logic at work, and once revealed and understood, a competent game is hiding under the hood.

Turn based strategy games are really quite fun, thoughtful and engrossing, and usually run at a necessarily plodding pace. But what if you took the ideas behind a fast-paced arcade game and made it a strategy game? Like a racing game, for instance? And what if it was in BASIC? The kind of ironically named Speed Race answers these questions.

Speedy it isn't, but it is a race. Taking into account your current velocity, some mathematics is needed to navigate around the tracks, but only one player at a time; hovering around a Speccy keyboard must be a sight too, and alas like my esteemed colleague, I do not have any friends to play this with. Add to the fact that I struggle mostly with the numbers because I'm no maths surgeon, but each track can be learnt by rote, which I am better able to do.

So playing the game by rote is kind of fun, and as there was no player two for me, it felt a bit like cheating at Card Solitaire. So, I won each round regardless. Learning the tracks also taught me the strategy and I finally got my head around the numbers. This does feel like a type-in of old in Big K magazine or something, the difference in this imagined 1983 type-in is that it would have had a more complete explanation. Fortunately, BreakSpace is here and our esteemed editorial prefect has worked it out for us; without this, I'd be lost.

I got name-checked twice in the reviews above, so I thought I should chip in my thruppence worth.

Playing Speed Race was mostly a meta experience of figuring out *how* to play Speed Race but once you grasp the basics it makes perfect sense. It's a logic puzzle after that, and one that's quite a pleasant challenge.

It does need a single player option, but you can replicate that by just pressing H whenever it's player 2's turn, and could really use a turn-counter so you can work towards beating your best score.

If you wanted to be really clever, it would play back your fastest laps in real time…but there's a million possibilities. It's not for everyone, but it's at least interesting, and there's a solid mechanic at the core that could be built out into something really excellent.

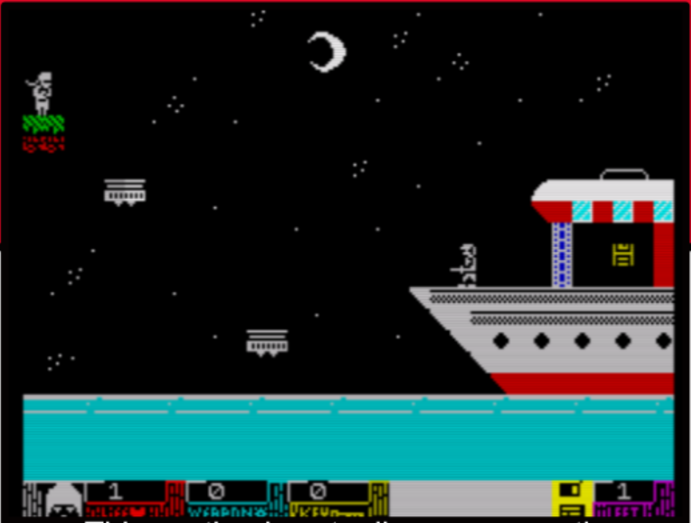
And it's in BASIC, with source available, so: off you go. There's nothing stopping you.

Ninja Secret Agent

Itho Games

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44723

Free



This section is actually very romantic

In this ZX Game Maker platformer, you find yourself in the soft-soled shoes of Ryu Sato – a ninja secret-agent chappie who has to infiltrate Death Island and recover two floppy disks that hold the key to stopping a nuclear war! Of course, everything depends on you, and only you, to save the world from a bunch of evil soldiers and goblins. I sincerely hope the fate of the world never does depend on just one man. And if it does, I hope it's not me. I think I'd let everyone down.

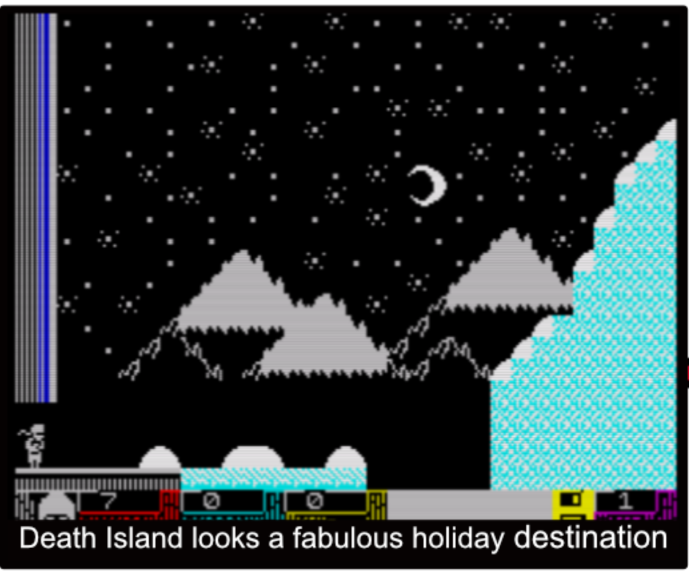
Why not just send an army of ninjas? Like the ending of You Only Live Twice – a whole bunch of them storming the island. That's what I would do if I was in charge.

The game is a simple affair. You know the drill - collect the keys, shoot the baddies, climb the ladders and try to make it to the exit. You begin with five lives, though they deplete at such an alarming rate you may as well have a tiny energy bar instead. Get stuck in some lava (or a shallow bit of water - some ninja!) or find an enemy attaching themselves to you and you'll soon be greeted by the game over screen – your dead body with a nuclear holocaust in the background. No "thanks for trying", no "don't worry, you gave it your best shot" – just a stark "The World Is Over." That's gratitude for you!

I also can't help feeling little Ryu is a bit ill-equipped for such an important mission, as you start the game armed only with ten shurikens. Fire one off and you must wait until it hits something or flies off the edge of the screen before you're allowed to shoot another – which can be a bit frustrating. Added to which, some of the exits won't open unless you kill every enemy in the room - so if you find yourself out of ammo - you end up a bit stuck.

Fortunately, you do have something else in your skillset: one of those classic ZX, Aled-Jones-"Walking in the Air" jump mechanics, where you seem to hover in thin air whenever you try to jump over something.

It's clear a lot of time has been spent on this game, and some of the graphics are gorgeous – especially the opening and closing screens. A special nod for the music as well, which is really rather jaunty. After playing a few games with such basic sound lately, it's nice to finally have a proper soundtrack!



Death Island looks a fabulous holiday destination

Ah, water. The ninja's most notorious enemy. A drop from the ceiling - deadly. Deep water - deadly. Water running down a wall - well, thats the most deadly water type of all. The game equips you with shuriken, but arm bands might have been more useful.

Yes, water is the main enemy. There are other baddies that sometimes fly around the screen at top speed. But these are better avoided, really. Best to just stay out of their way.

The shuriken are essential for progress. You need them for gardening. Of course! You guessed that, right? How else would a ninja cut back the bracken and vines blocking his path? There is no better tool. You don't want to get grass stains on your katana, after all.

So, this game could be repackaged as "Water Wings and Gardening Adventure" and the level design could stay exactly the same. "Monty Don's Swimming Proficiency Debacle", or "Alan Titchmarsh and the Quest to Overcome His Aquaphobia" are both workable alternative titles.

For some reason, your actual mission is to retrieve two floppy disks, so it's not really water-themed at all. But if you fail, it causes a nuclear armageddon that wipes out all life on Earth. With stakes that high, they really should have given you a kagool.

Army of Ninja?

Jon raises an interesting question. Can the Spectrum field an army of ninja? It's certainly got a wide variety of types : Hamsters, Grannys, Gardeners and multiple Last Ninjas, confusingly. Weeding out duplicates and unreleased titles, we count 32 games with 'Ninja' in the title. Not as many as we'd have guessed, but more than Samurai (8) , Commando (15) or Soldier (7).

All badly outnumbered, however, by the 114 Managers on ZXDB.

Can 114 managers defeat 32 ninja? A duel we'd all love to see, I'm sure.

Speccy Saga

Lee 'Chopz' Stevenson

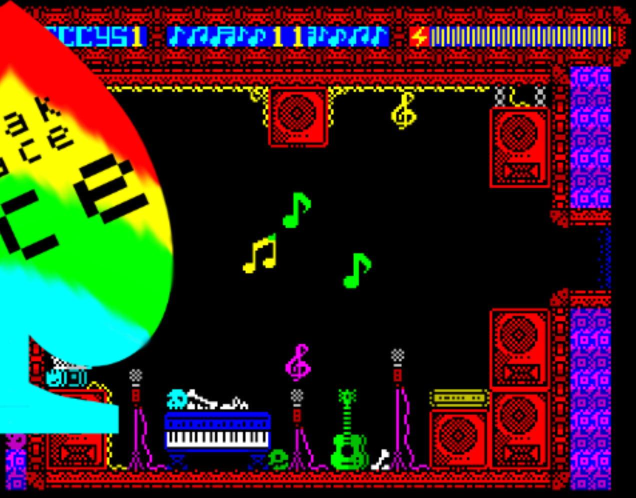
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44653

Free

All the way back in issue 3 of BreakSpace we reviewed Lee Chops Stevenson's "The Rubber Keyed Wonder", a charming flick screen affair that was the official game of the hit Spectrum documentary from Gracious Films.

There was much to love about the game, although it did fall victim to something that used to plague Spectrum titles back in the day in the shape of the release deadline, which meant that the game had to be finished in time to coincide with the release of the doc that inspired it. Now that Lee has had time to tinker and refine the game, Speccy is back in a bigger and better adventure, "Speccy Saga: Codename RKW".

Gameplay wise, Codename RKW plays similarly to its predecessor, you must set plungers to unlock new areas, cope with fixed path & respawning nasties, deal with gravity and collect musical instruments. The cute anthropomorphic instruments are back, as is a superb soundtrack.



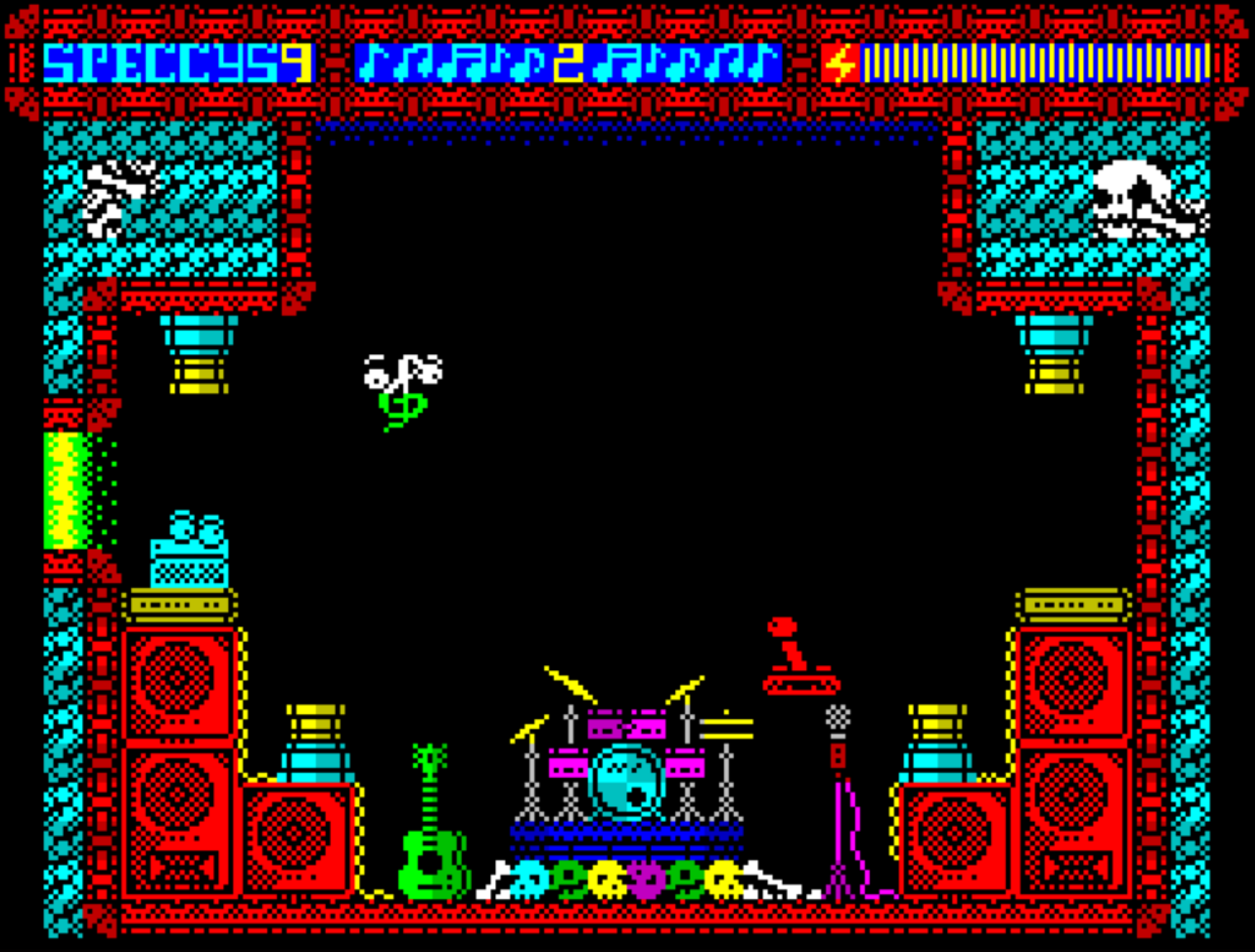
Time to face the music

The game doesn't quite feel as punishing as the original, especially when you realise that you can use the headphones to recharge your health. It took me a few goes to twig this, but it is literally a game changer! I went from not having a hope to actually being able to see it through to its conclusion. If that's still not enough of an assist, Lee has also kindly included a cheat mode where if you press "C" on the loading screen you can unlock infinite lives.

Once you retrieve all the items with the stabilisers on, there's a real incentive to go back and prove your mettle without the added support.

Lee has once again taken the time to provide us with an enhanced ULA+ version. Although I always prefer the original Speccy colours, it looks fantastic and rounds out the package nicely.

Once again, the consistently impressive Microchops has delivered the goods and a game which is well worthy of your time. Don't forget to drop a few quid donation to https://www.justgiving.com/charity/southendcysticfibrosisassociation for their efforts.



Who knew Ringo played atop a pile of skulls? Take that, Peter Jackson.

There's one problem facing anyone making a flip-screen hovering shooter on the Spectrum : Cybernoid. That's what you're up against, here. Many people's favourite Spectrum game, if you push them on it. But your friend and mine, Chopz, is not one to be cowed by titans of the past. Not at all. This is not his first bite at the cherry, but he's certaintly gotten his teeth into it this time.

Let's talk first about how good it looks - packed with clearly drawn, colourful sprites. Everything's characterful and charming, even the jagged spikes and grim skulls that somehow infest the backrooms of the music shop. Googly eyes make anything better, and the main Speccy sprite certainly befits from his ocular bolt-ons. It'd be hard to take against him.

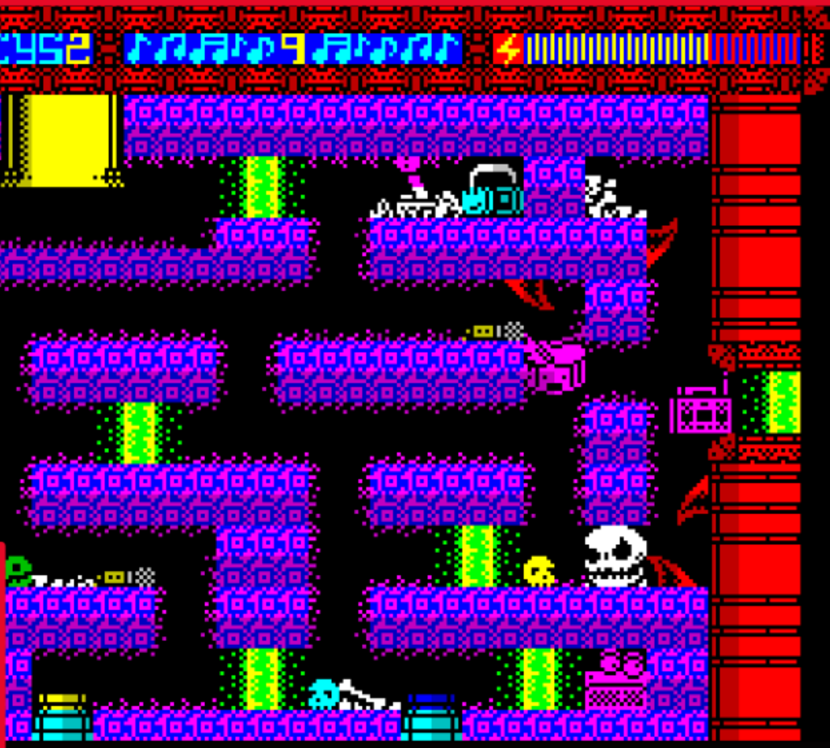
As befits a music-themed game, it has a pleasant sondtrack too. It's all very slickly put together.

The plot, describing the intra-dimensional theft of 'every musical instrument on Earth', hardly matters but it's just enough to explain why you have to find 11 instruments and make your way home. Perhaps you can leave the bagpipes in the other dimension, that'd be fine.

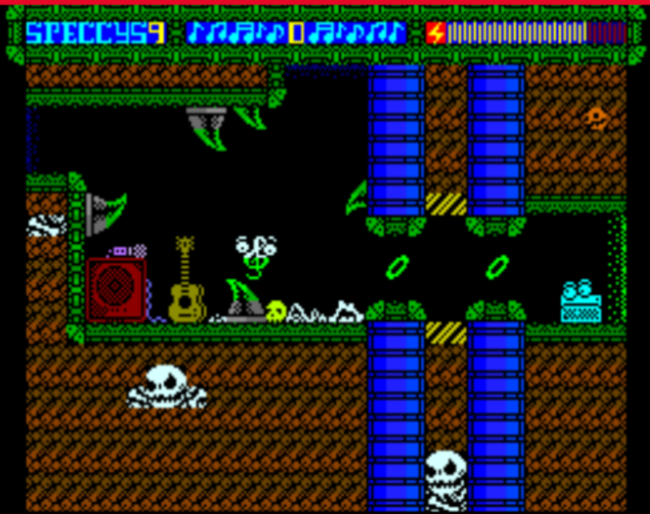
Once you're underway, it's a case of triggering buttons to open force-fields, zapping enemies, dodging semi-quavers and the like and exploring the sizeable map. Everything from musical notes to the afore-mentioned spikes saps your generous energy reserves, but there are equally generous scatterings of headphones lying about, with which you can recharge via the power of music.

The big difference between this and Cybernoid is that Speccy Saga very much wants you to complete it. Aside from the multiple lives and rechargeable energy, there's a continue option when you do finally succumb which restarts with your collected instruments as they were.

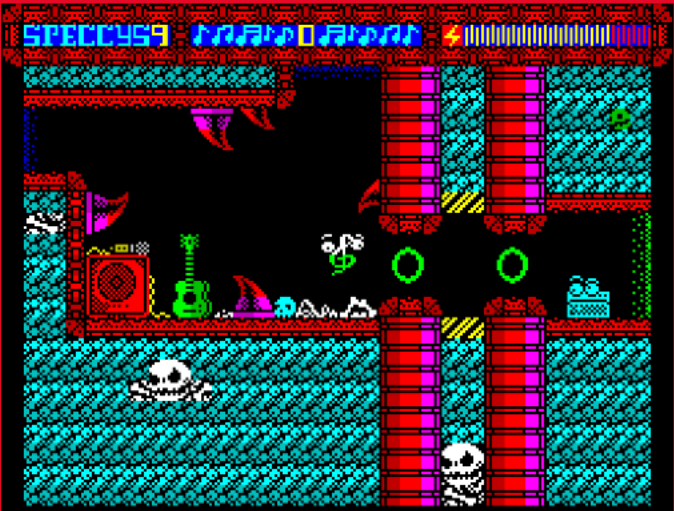
So, while individual screens are densely designed and often tricky, the game as a whole is eminently completeable. So, you should get to see everything, but the challenge of 1-crediting it is always there. A real pleasant time, all in all.



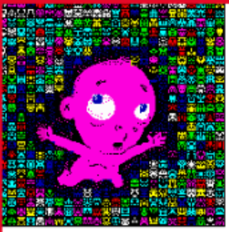
A magenta Speccy? Whatever next?



The ULA+ colour mode, with added orange…



…Vs the traditional view.



The Rubber Keyed Wonder was impressive enough, but without being bound by time pressure Lee Chops has turned it up to eleven with Speccy Saga. While it's a much bigger game, the main improvement comes from going that little bit easier on the player. Screens that were Sisyphean due to spawning baddies have now been toned down and are actually enjoyable.

It keeps Pedro Pimento's invigorating AY, and Rich Hollins returns with a beeper track, different to the last but still worthy of a Peel Session. The trademark Northern Games look is there too, with dreamy cartoon sprites and deft mixing of pixels & attributes. Each screen is the work of art to which we're becoming accustomed.

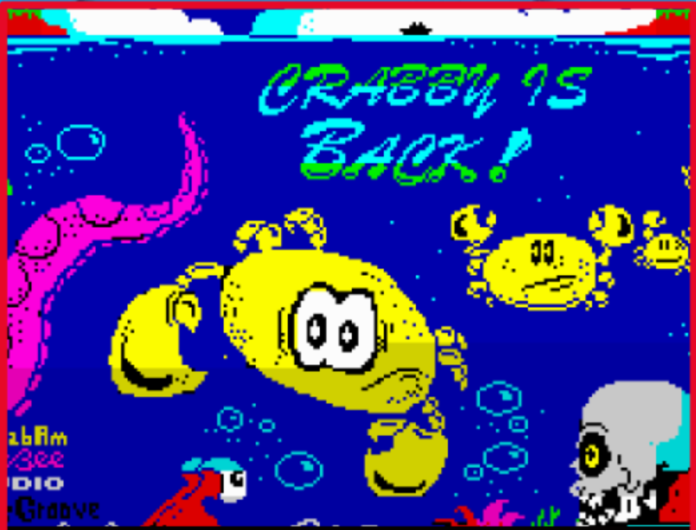
Just think what would have been possible if developers weren't stymied by deadlines BITD... Jet Set Willy might not have had the Attic Bug. Monty Mole might have had *predictable* crushers. And if the Cassette 50 authors were given time to reach their twenties it might have been the best compilation in history. But there's no point dreaming, and no need when we have games like Speccy Saga.

Crabby Is Back

Gabriele Amore

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45121

Free



I should have stopped at two.

There are those who said "Crabby is Back" is a reference to my return to ZX games reviewing. To them I say a) "Rude!" and b) the subject is not my reviewing style or my general demeanour (tho I can be a grumpy old poop). It is in fact Crabby the crab, in the manner of John Wick, who is back.

Yes indeedy, in a much anticipated followup to "C is for Crabby", a popular 2013 "homebrew" game from Italian dev Gabriele Amore, Crabby is Back. He has returned for more undersea adventures, collecting his chums from submerged caves and dropping them into exit holes while avoiding obstacles.

As with the original game you control Crabby, an adorable little crab sprite, with the standard QAOP or Kempston, and you must pick up every little friend from where they are sitting in the undersea screen and carry them to the exit.

The catch (and it's a biggie) is that as you "catch" them you end up dangling them all beneath you, and with these dangling chums you must still paddle around the screen. The string of chums gets longer with each one you collect and you must move with them under you while avoiding either yourself or the dangling chums banging into the many hazards.

And the hazards are numerous. There's little anemone creatures who blorp out a bubble which rises, and an assortment of other delightful sea creatures paddling about, all of whom will deliver what looks like an electric shock to Crabby or his dangly friends.

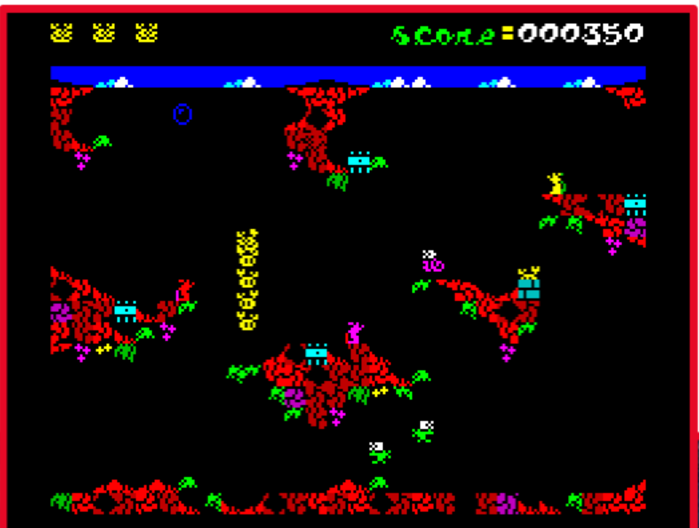
(It strikes me that there may potentially be a strategy element to this. It might be that there are certain zones of the screen where the order of collection is important. I haven't encountered it yet but I'm looking out for it.)

Now it all seems impossible at first, but you soon realise that fortunately the scenery is not itself an obstacle. Your chums can pass behind it all, and only you can stand on anything or have to swim around anything. In this manner you can shimmy around the caves, making sure you or your chums don't get a jolt from the inhabitants.

As game mechanics go this is quite original, and there's a flavour of the old Snake game where length is added to the player as the game progresses making it harder as you go.

It's adorable, with lovely animation and characterisation and the game provides a lot of absorbing play: part twitch, part strategy, part platformer… all Crabby.

So there you have it, a really fun game which provides enough of a challenge to satisfy the platformer while engaging your brain and spacial awareness to complete each screen.



Helicopter parenting

Old habits die shell-hard. Gedit? OK, I'm getting my coat. Or rather, I'm getting my wetsuit!

Unlike my humour, Crabby is Back is a clever, nautical gem. You guide a growing line of lost crabs to safety.

The simple herding concept hides deceptively deep-water puzzles. Each rescued crab lengthens your line of langoustine, which becomes your main obstacle. Navigating this wiggling chain through tight, hazardous spaces requires equal parts sharp reflexes and smarter route-planning. It's a constant, funny battle against your own crustacean conga line.

The charm is in the challenge. Success demands the patience of a clam. Rush, and you'll create a pinching pile-up (which could frustrate those wanting the game to cater to cat-fish-like reflexes). But a well-executed plan, leading your full squadron home, is hugely satisfying.

The bottom line: A tight, enormously cute puzzle game that makes a splash with one perfect idea. Plan carefully, stay patient, and you'll avoid too many crabby crash-out moments.

Now get out there and make some waves. Just remember: it's not about the claws, it's about the cause.

OK, I have donned both my wetsuit and coat and am rightfully leaving. Good night and try the fish.

Great! A Gabriele Amore game. They're always good fun. Always a bit different, well designed. We even did a nice, heartfelt interview piece with him last issue, after he'd announced his retirement….WAIT A SECOND! He's done what? Released another game? Seems he has a similar attitude to retirement as The Who. Unforgiveable behaviour, honestly.

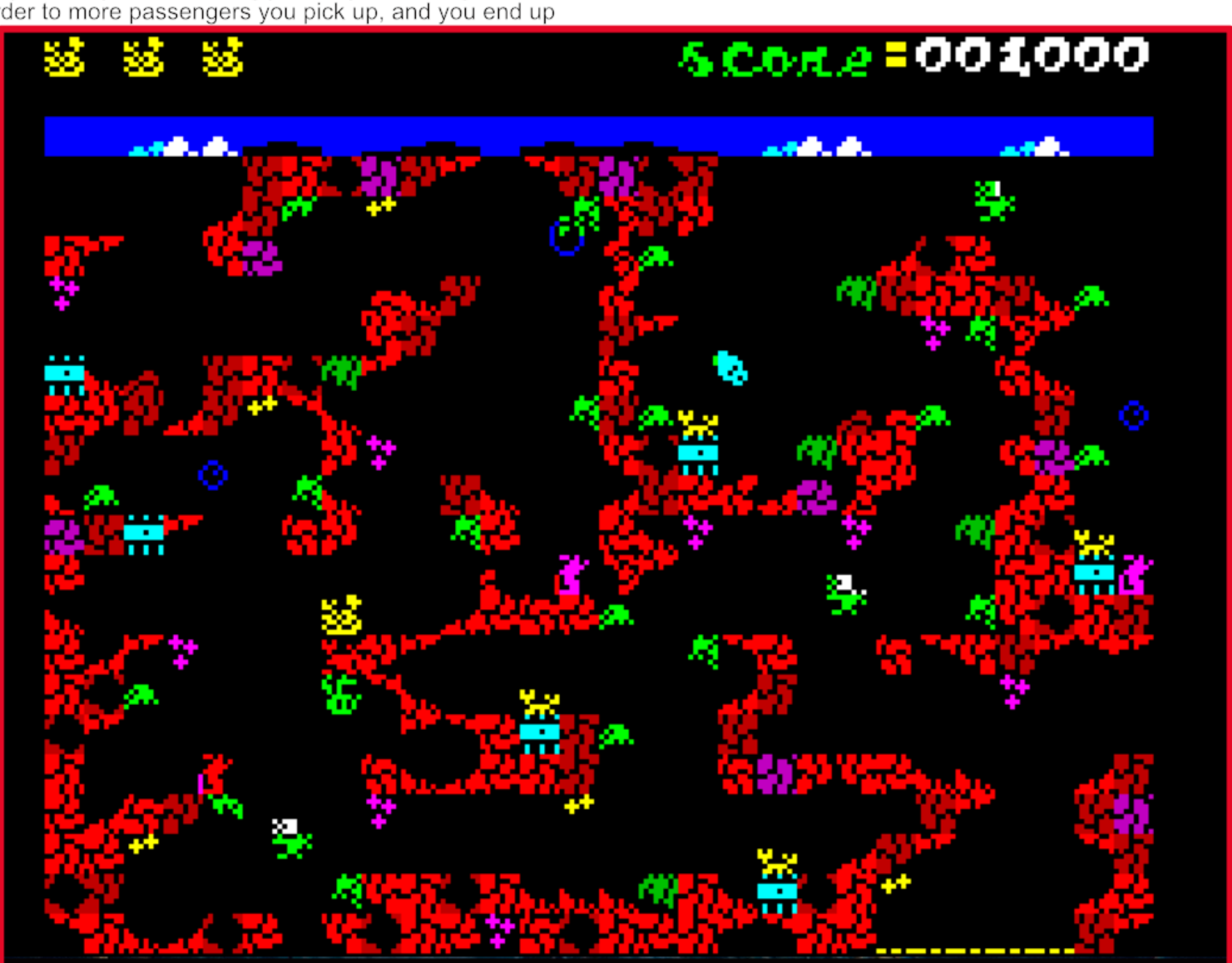
So, instead of taking his laurels and gracefully bowing out, he's popped back up bacause apparently, and I quote here, he "Felt a bit bad leaving the scene without a little something for xmas...". Which is very nice. I just can't stay mad at him.

Especially when the something in question is as clever as this. It's kinda brilliant, really. Navigating the tight mazes, packed as they are with perils, is tricky enough when it's just you, but your increasingly clumsy swimming makes it harder to more passengers you pick up, and you end up having to watch not just the corridor you're in, but the one below you that your end-most offspring is swinging into. There are lots of tooth-sucking near-misses as you get as close as you can to the roof, while a dangerous fish just barely has enough room to scrape past your dangling progeny.

And we should make note of the character and animation of the assorted fishes and anenomone... anonym… ananymo….coral formations and they swim about and wave in the unseen currents. It really is excellent work, visually. There's a lot of character packed into these 8x8 pixel beasties.

This is top class all round - cleverly designed, gorgeously drawn and with an excellent soundtrack. It's right up there with this developers best.

All is forgiven, GabAm. Now get back to work.



Cramped quarters

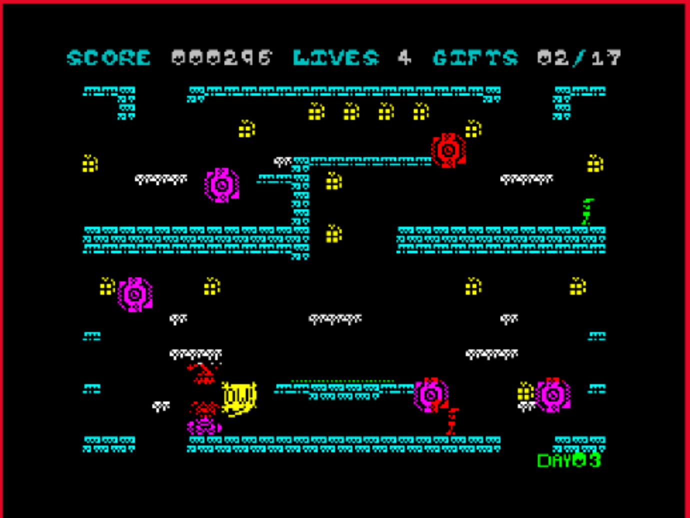
Throbbin' Christmas Headache

KTB Productions

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45160

Free

Long term Break Space fans may remember me gushing about the original Throbbing Headache and its Valentine's Day spin off, Throbby Heartache. Well Robby has returned for another special occasion themed platformer, that's right, the game with the wackiest sideways jump in 8-bit history is BACK baby!



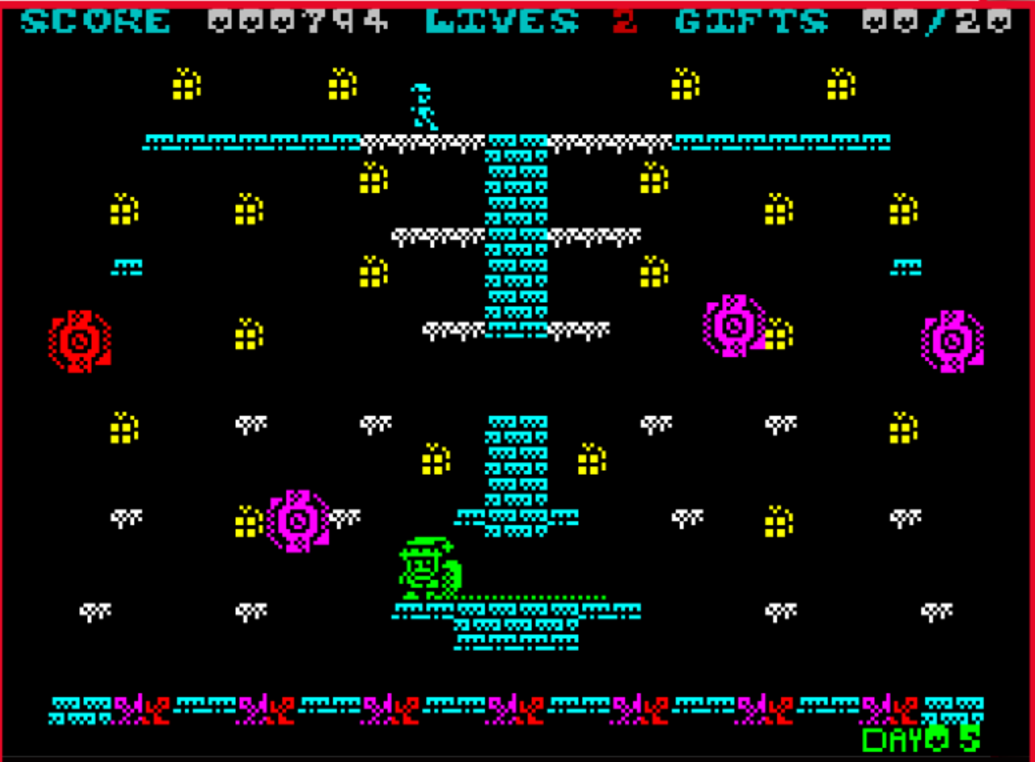
Someone's on the Naughty List

Father Christmas has gone missing and having landed the job of an in-store Santa, our hero Robby is apparently the person best equipped to head to the North Pole to undo the damage the unsupervised elves have wrought. This is achieved by gathering pressies that have been scattered across the extremely hazardous levels to save Christmas for the little 'uns, won't somebody think of the children?

Word of warning, much like the previous games in the series, it's tough, it's unforgiving and the unique sideways jump mechanic takes a lot of getting used to. You will die numerous times at the hands of those pesky elves, resulting in much unseasonal language. However the satisfaction that comes from successfully clearing a level makes it all worthwhile. There are 13 levels in total, with a "Blitz" style delivering presents bonus level, however I freely admit that even after many many plays I saw less than half of what the game has to offer.

The graphics are fun and the death animation is cute, which is a good job as you get to enjoy it a lot. There are some jolly festive tunes in 128k mode that may grate a little, but you can always play the 48k version if that's not your bag. I've been enjoying playing this one in that blissful downtime period between Christmas and New Year, as this issue of Break Space isn't due until mid January it might "hit" a little different playing it outwith the Xmas bubble.

It doesn't quite displace the mighty Moley Christmas as the quintessential Xmas Speccy game, but it is certainly a welcome addition to the pantheon of festive challenges that can be unwrapped each December to get you into the Yuletide spirit.



A Clear and Presents Danger

Well, it's taken me three 'Throbbers' to finally fall in love with this game's jump mechanic. At first it seems INSANE, but finish a few levels and it feels like the most natural thing in the world. And importantly, while it looks erratic, it's totally predictable & playable. Who'd have thought that after all this time there'd be still be innovations in the fundamental systems of platform games—it's a Physics PhD waiting to happen.

The music is bearable, at least in comparison to the *avant-garde* AY that was in Painterman from the same publisher. Still, play the 48K version eh (sorry @scrwm!). That aside, just about everything in this game is right up my street. It's hard, perhaps hard enough to warrant a default infy lives (after all it is Christmas!). Though maybe it'll be easier in the New Year, when you're out of the festive sherry haze and into the hyper-focussed achiever mode of alcohol-free Veganuary.

I hope this author keeps going strong with these quirky, innovative games. And if Sloany is allowed to say "outwith", then I'm going to go rogue on Ed's embargo on my use of fancy words and offer KTB Productions a most glowing encomium.

F1 Championship

Francesco Forte

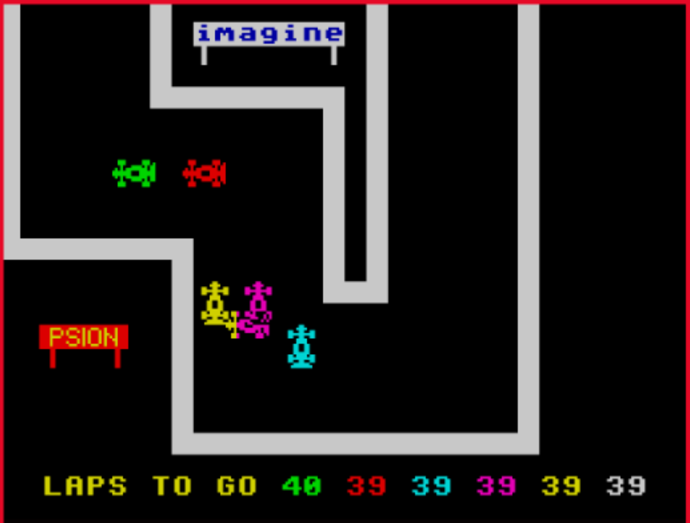
https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44914

Free

Warning! playing this game on rubber keys will give you carpal tunnel syndrome. It's best played on a Spectrum+ upwards, otherwise each ~40 lap race will be more gruelling than the real thing. And you'd better get used to being the underdog, because you're on team Sinclair, racing against the likes of Lotus, Ferrari and McLaren. While your car is a few notches up from a C5, it's got way less poke than everyone else in the pack. This is most noticeable on the straights, where you'll get instantly dropped in a head-to-head, so guile and tenacity are the order of the day.

The only chance you have of staying ahead is never erring on a corner, and blocking like you're a tractor on a protest. Neither of these traits are in my nature, so I had to do some real life training to get match fit: I hired a Toyota Aygo and drove in the middle lane of the M6 from Junctions 32–17. It was only when I stopped hyperventilating at Sandbach services that I felt I had sufficient brass neck to play.

With these tactics in mind, you'll have a good chance of winning on sinuous tracks like Hockenheim, but motorways like Zandvoort are exercises in damage limitation. In fact you'll often find yourself driving alone and having to manage your expectations: if you can't win, try not to come last; if you've been dropped, try not to get lapped; if you've been lapped, try not to get lapped by everyone; if you get lapped by everyone, pick an opponent and try to spoil their race. It's clearly not an easy game, but the author assures us that it is possible to win.



LAPS TO GO 40 39 39 39 39 39

Must. Not. Get. Lapped.

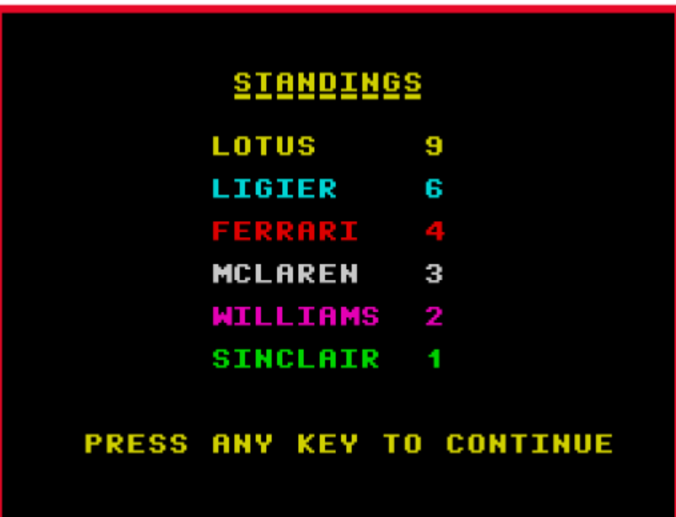
Author Francesco also informs me that it was his most difficult game to make. It uses AGD with custom assembly language routines to handle the other cars. Much of the action takes place out of sight and needs careful tuning. This is one of the reasons the other cars are faster than you—it was just too easy on a level playing field.

As a silent flip-screen game it may not have all the thrill of the official EA Sports version, but one thing it has over many 3D perspective racers is that you can easily see who is approaching from behind and take evasive action. And the feeling of skirmishing that brings more than makes up for the absence of sound and gears. Playing F1 Championship makes me involuntarily jerk my feet, lean into corners and swear at the competitors, which must be a sign that it's getting the important stuff right. Now, where are my car keys? This time I'll make it to Crewe…

Now this is more like it: a top-down arcade racer that is pacey and simple to understand. No maths, not much thinking, and some muscle memory to learn and track layouts to master. Although, it took me a few goes to get used to the controls, or more precisely the almost complete stop from when you depress the direction you wish to travel, this was rather good. But it's by no means perfect, and there is one show-stopping bug that I cannot ignore.

In some instances, should you finish the race one or more laps ahead of another computer controlled competitor, the race does not finish. I guess only a POKE or two can save this, but in my case I needed to reset and reload. The game is played over three tape images too, and another small niggle here is that when the next set of tracks are loaded, the keys reset to the default Q, A, O and P, which if you've redefined previously you'll have to do that again. These bugs aside, let's get into the game.

You are Team Sinclair, a green coloured Formula One racing team, and the task is to complete the 13 tracks for points. At the end of all 13 tracks, if scores are tied for first place, the team with the most track wins is the overall champion. But whilst this feels like a pick up and play game, it is not. For each track, you need to run a qualifying lap which will place you against the six competitors; I am usually last or second to last. And then each race is run over between 32 and 45 laps. If you are going to play through to the end, ensure you have a free afternoon with few distractions.



```
        STANDINGS

      LOTUS       9
      LIGIER      6
      FERRARI     4
      MCLAREN     3
      WILLIAMS    2
      SINCLAIR    1

  PRESS ANY KEY TO CONTINUE
```

We need a bigger battery

There's a good game and fun mechanic here, but as stated above it is somewhat flawed. This is one of those racing games where all computer controlled competitors are better and faster racers, and the only strategy to gain more than the one point for last place is to block your competitors; you are able to trap all others behind you and control and delay their progress. By doing so, you might actually win some of the courses, and it takes a bit of practice to learn the best routes to cut off the computer controlled cars. It's a good 2D flip screen racer that, if patched to remove its bugs, this would be blummin' excellent.

Bolalela 5

BeykerSoft

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44706

Free

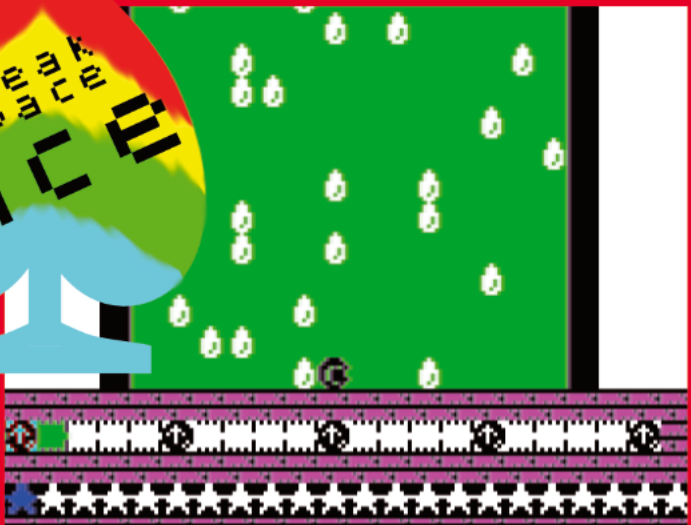
Bouncing ball games are numerous and pre-date the personal computer by some years.

Some time in the 1980s, specifically 1986 I think, this simple concept added platforms, with two examples of this being Bounder, and Cauldron II: The Pumpkin Strikes Back (though the protagonist is a bouncing Pumpkin). Both are brutally difficult but are great fun too.

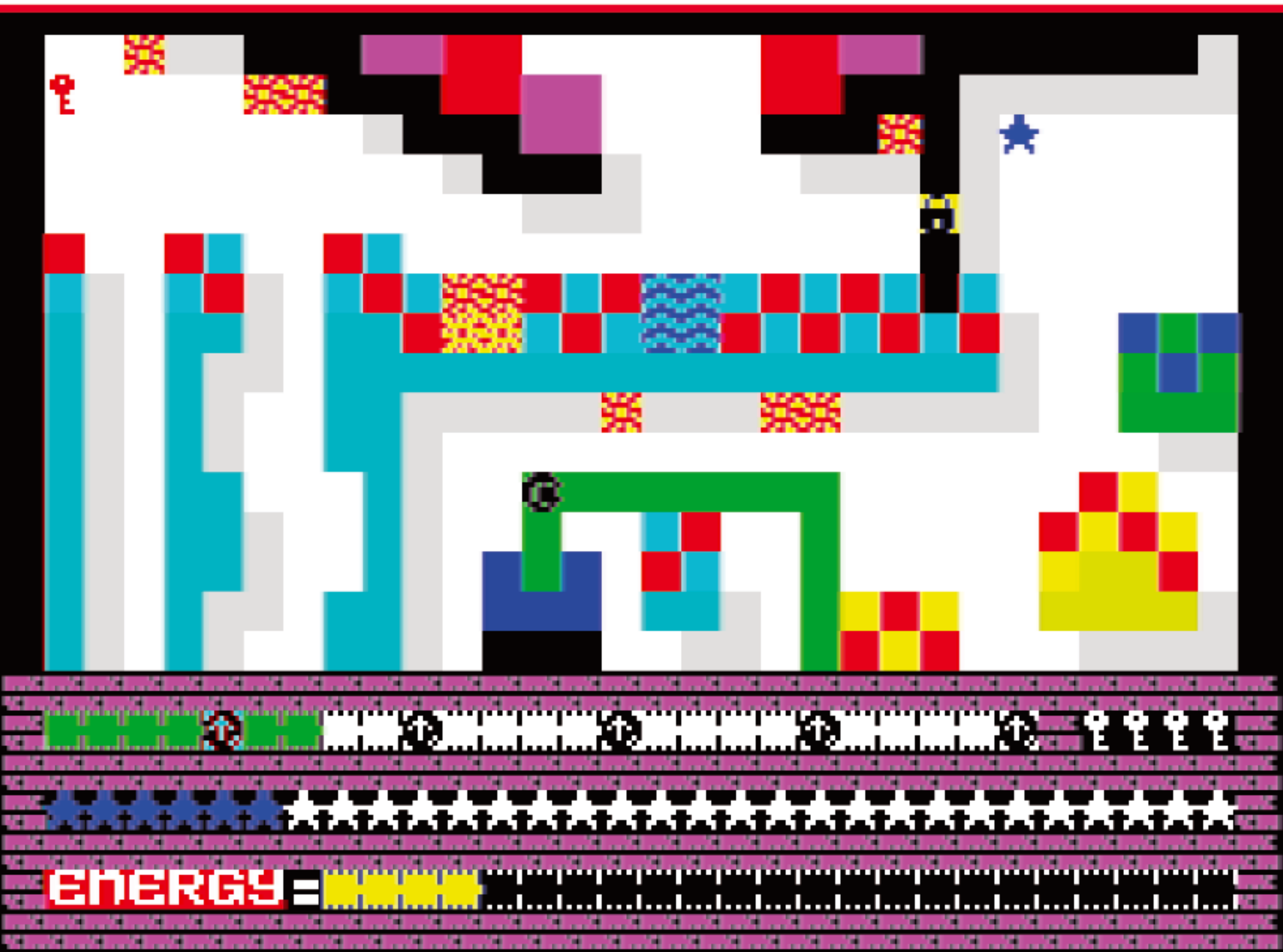
Bolalela 5 is sort of Bounder-alike, but more of a puzzle/maze affair than an arcade game. What's surprising here is the attribute scrolling; for BASIC, it's fast, and in fact the listing has some machine code support as shifting just attribute data is slow otherwise, and shifting screen data would be slower still. This importantly adds to the playability, with the premise being to guide an ever-bouncing spherical around a kind of 2.5D playfield. Overall, this BASIC/MC hybrid works well.

There are gates to unlock, fast tubes that allow for short cuts, and even at least one minigame in which acidic rain must be dodged. Collect all of the stars to win is what the title screen says. The maze is vertically stacked, so progressing is in an upwardly direction. But beware the pitfalls as it can set you back to an earlier part of the game; not by any means is this too frustrating as it is all part of the learning curve.

Bolalela 5 is very well done; the presentation is quality, the layout is thoughtful, and the graphics, whilst limited to 8x8 blocks, are pretty good too. The simple left-right controls work well too, with the bounce mechanic easy to guide and, unlike the aforementioned Cauldron II, this is much less frustrating. Sound is functional only, but the star of the show is its playability. It's a very entertaining release with quite a lot of polish, and one that I recommend highly.



Avoid the rain. It's just like Death Stranding



Bright enough for you?

Gah! My eyes!

Often my first impression of a game will be the reviews that the gang send me. Once I scrape the salted caramel and other stains off the manuscript, I'll typically turn to the screenshots to see what I'm dealing with.

First impressions here were not favourable. Just look at that big screenshot - it's like a Spectrum mid-reset. But, as my deal old mother has always told me, looks aren't everything. Every game gets a fair shake.

And this more than most, as it turned out - not only was this an entrant in the Bytemaniacos BASIC contest, it only went and won it. The same contest that featured Ace winner ZXnake 2. So we're clearly dealing with a serious contender here.

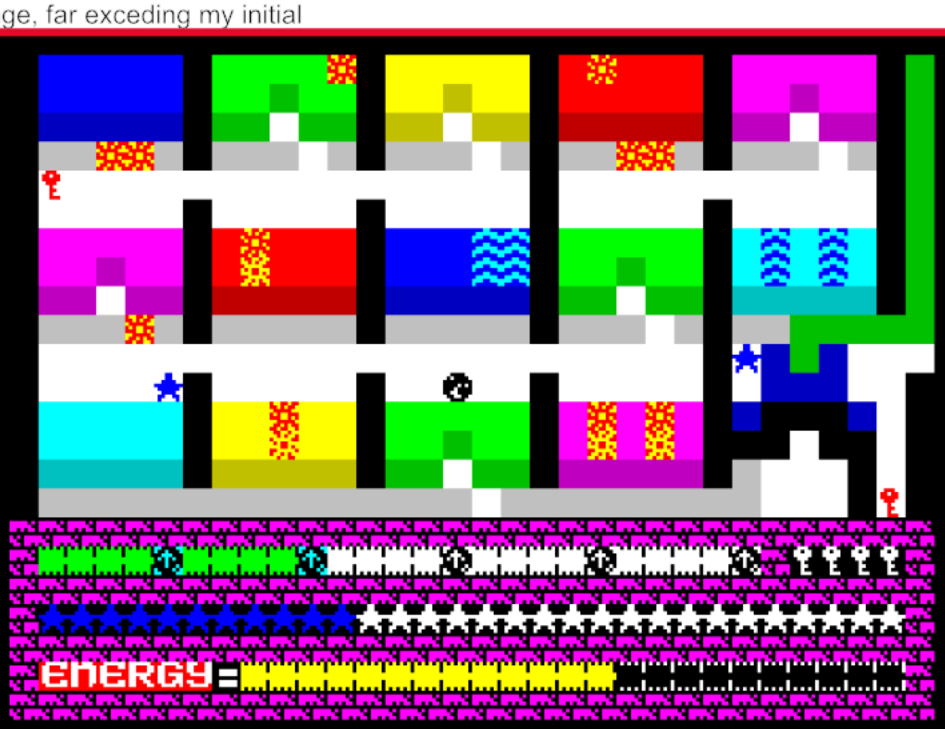
And contend it does. The game I was most reminded of was Gremlin classic Thing Bounces Back, with its tubular shortcuts and constant boinging. But while I always struggled a little to control ol' Thing, I had no such issues with Bolalela. Not to suggest that the game is easy, mind, just that I was always happy that the wee ball was doing exactly what I asked of it, with only the slightest hint of BASIC input delay.

The vertical maze is well designed, with just the right amount of back-tracking. Sometimes intentional, sometimes because you've blundered down a hole. There's a 3-D element to the presentation too, which wasn't immediately obvious to me at first glance and took a little getting used to. My Oeil was not quite Trompe'd.

But after a few games it started to become clear, and I was making serious progress upwards. Even though there are only two controls (left and right) and there are no mobile threats, if feels like there is a lot more going on here than in most platformers, The screens are packed with little bouncing set-pieces, which sometimes even change if you've doubled back on yourself, if you have increased your bounce height in the meantime.

Technically, it doesn't so much solve BASIC limitations as much as it accepts them and makes them work in its favour.

It all adds up to a novel and charming challenge, far exceding my initial expectations. So, yes, Mother, you were right again. This is bit of a gem.



Choose your path wisely…

Beykersoft has done remarkably well with the 'Bolalela' franchise. The first instalment was in 2007 when it won the pure BASIC category of the Bytemaniacos Concurso. Since then we've had side-scrolling versions and single screen tenliners that are way more fun than they ought to be. They all have 2 things in common: a UDG bouncing ball, and two fingers planted firmly on the O & P keys (actually that's 3 things – Ed).

It's fair to say though, that Bolalela 5 is in a different weight category to the rest—it's bigger, FLASHier and most definitely BRIGHTer. To get such fast vertical scrolling requires a bit of sorcery. The first trick is literally that: most of what you are looking at is ink & paper the same colour, which hides the pixels underneath and avoids the need to spend time redrawing or deleting them. There is also the POKEing of the DEFADD system variable (see ZXMoe's coding tips in the last issue). All this optimisation doesn't leave many options for the graphics, but Beyker has done a good job of creating a 3D effect using PAPER colour alone.

The large distances you travel, both up and down, as well as through portal tunnels, give it an exhilarating pinball simulator feel. Sooner or later we'll stop feeling awed by releases like this. For now though, Bolalela 5 is yet another game taking an entry level programming language to an even higher level, in leaps and bounds.

Starball

Wizbit

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45164

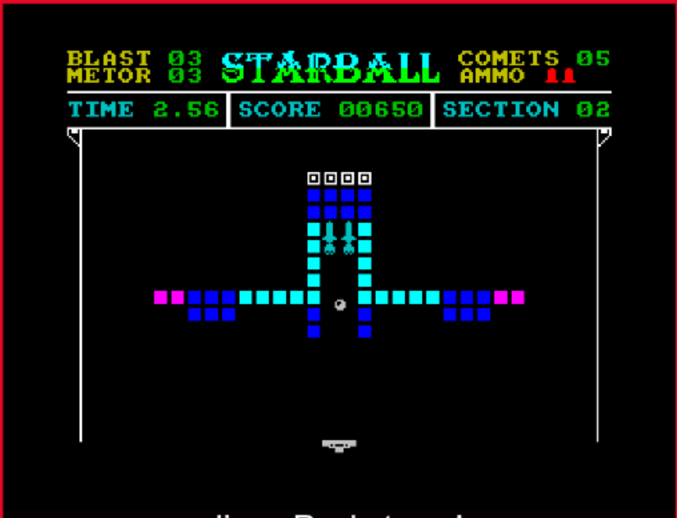
Free

Late in 2025 a brace of "bat, ball & wall" games have landed on the Speccy. I'm not (ark)annoyed by this as I'm Batty about them, but is Starball going to be a Breakout hit? Let's go Thro' the Wall and find out!

There's no pretence of a storyline or plot here, it's just a straight up game of paddle Vs bricks, set across 20 colourful levels. There aren't even any floating baddies and you cannot release random power ups from the bricks you destroy. There is a time limit though, you have 3 minutes to complete each level, which is one whole minute less than Madonna and Justin Timberlake had to save the world.

Starball has an ace up its sleeve however, in the form of special weapons that you can unleash when your back's against the wall. One power up explodes the ball into dozens of tiny prices, taking out every block in their path. Another beefs up your projectile, allowing it to cause maximum clearage. Your third option is to send up some rockets to wipe an entire column of bricks.

Having power ups from the start brings a tactical edge to proceedings, differentiating Starball from its peers. Beginning with five lives and a fistful of power ups you should have enough in your arsenal to see you through the first few screens, however if you use them up too soon, you realise that you should perhaps keep something in the tank for the later levels.



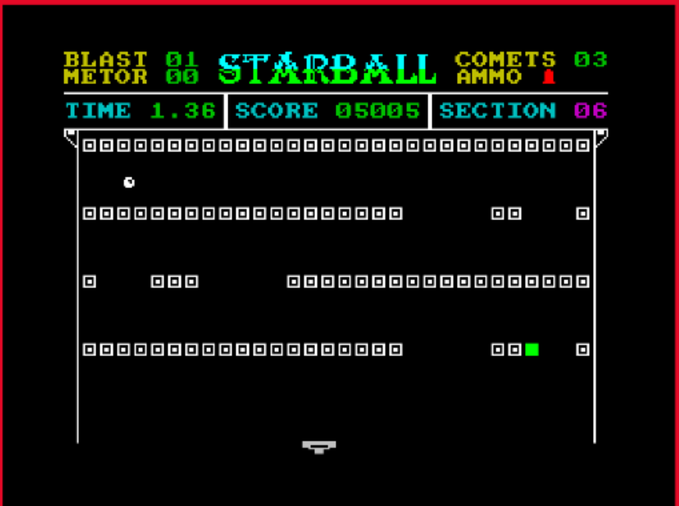
I'm a Rocketman!

The trajectory of the ball and the angles that it bounces off your paddle takes a bit of getting used to and the paddle can be just that little bit too slow to catch up with the ball if it bounces at a funny angle from a low lying brick. As is often the case with Breakout inspired games, it can sometimes be frustrating to clear the last brick or two, especially if those bricks are behind indestructible walls. I often found the ball bouncing around aimlessly, going nowhere near the last brick, while I still had a long two minutes left on the clock to contemplate my life choices.

These frustrations are par for the course with bat ball games and can be overcome by tactical deployment of your power ups and getting more savvy with your angles. More positively, there are small gaps between the rows of bricks. These gaps facilitate a neat trick, where you can guide the ball between them and take out two whole rows at once, which is extremely satisfying.

There's a secondary game to play here too, the soundtrack contains some mad renditions of classic 80s tunes and the game within a game is to identify them. Most of you will get Toto's Africa on the 1st level, but the tracks become pretty obscure pretty quickly.

Overall Starball is a great addition to the genre, building on its predecessors while bringing some new ideas to the party. It's challenging and fun, the sort of "easy to learn, difficult to master" malarky that Spectrum games excel at and keep me coming back for more.



That ball's never coming down, is it?

As the vicar said to me last week: "Dip your balls in glitter and get ready for a wild ride." We were, of course, talking about Starball, a balls-hard breakout-style game for the ZX Spectrum +2. Get your mind out of the gutter!

Starball is a glittery arcade bouncer with polish and truly standout music. By now, the format is familiar – smack your balls into blocks to smash 'em to bits and clear the level. There are a range of awesome power-ups to help – My personal favourite, the giant missiles that blast half the level to bits!

The game feels fast and frantic, and it's very clear that where your balls hit your bat makes a big difference to the direction and speed they pick up on the bounce.

A minor downside, collision detection. Occasionally, the ball passes through a block without reacting to it. This is a major problem because you move so slowly; it's essential to predict where your ball will bounce and move your paddle in anticipation. Dying because your ball ghosted through a block rather than following the expected direction feels unfair in my book – and more than a little frustrating.

That aside, this block-breaking game is smashing. It's a must-play for the music alone.

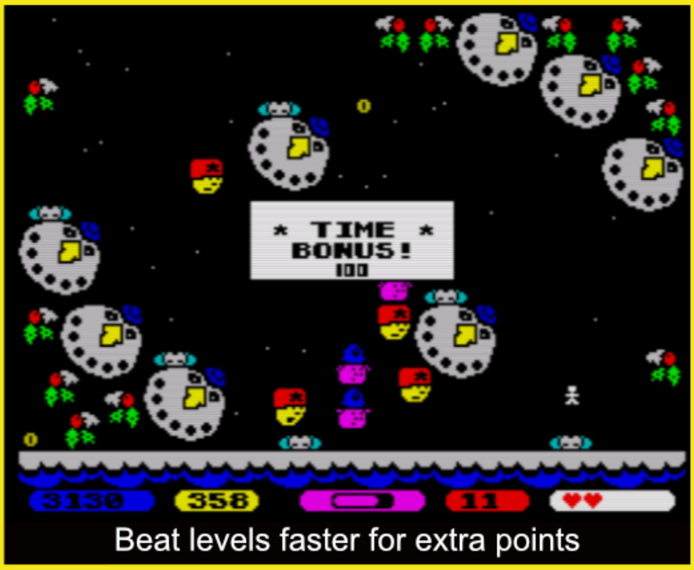
All in all, Starball has a lot of polish – enough to set it apart from the numerous similar-style games on the platform. Well worth a look – this Starball shines bright!

Soy Stomper Junior

The Death Squad

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45159

PWYW / $2



Beat levels faster for extra points

I was hoping to get a festive game to review in my Christmas stocking, and Santa delivered! With my heart full of seasonal cheer, I downloaded Soy Stomper Junior and settled down to read the inlay that came with it.

According to said inlay, the local council – or the PTA, or whoever they are (described as “bed-wetting, soy-latte-drinking eunuchs”, though to me they look just like the main character from the Amiga game Putty) – have cancelled the Christmas nativity at Basterdale Primary School. I won’t go into the reasons why here...I like to think of Breakspace Towers as Switzerland – politically neutral. All you really need to know is that your job is to stomp on their heads across each level, all the while dodging the local fuzz and what looks like guards drafted in from the Kremlin.

Mmm… not exactly A Christmas Carol, is it?

Plot aside, the game is very bright and colourful, with no colour clash. The backgrounds are festive, cute, and pleasingly cartoony and there's a nice rendition of "O Come, All Ye Faithful" playing throughout. The gameplay itself is very addictive too – I had a huge amount of fun darting around the 11 or so levels. The aim is to hop your little stickman onto one of the blue splodge people and hit space to start stomping. Don’t stop stomping until it’s properly stomped!

Each level introduces more baddies, all of whom slowly gang together and follow you around the screen. If you’re not careful, you can quickly find yourself trapped as they pile in on you – no doubt eager to club you senseless with their truncheons. A good tactic, then, is to never stop moving and keep changing direction. Keep those coppers on their toes! The game isn’t particularly long – it took me about 20 minutes to complete – but I enjoyed every minute of it.

Apparently this is a sequel to a game called Soy Stomper, although I couldn’t find a trace of the original anywhere. The author also states this is something of a rush-release to get it out in time for Christmas, and mentions another version with updated music on the horizon. If he decides to add a few more levels as well, that would be something to really look forward to.

BONUS TIP: Don’t forget to stomp on Santa’s head to make him vomit up a bonus coin. (Yes, you read that right.)

“What’s to-day, my fine fellow?” I hollered down the tower staircase from my chambers.

“To-day!” replied Dave. “Why, Christmas Day!”

"I haven’t missed it! Tell me, do you know if anyone has reviewed that Death Squad Christmas game?"

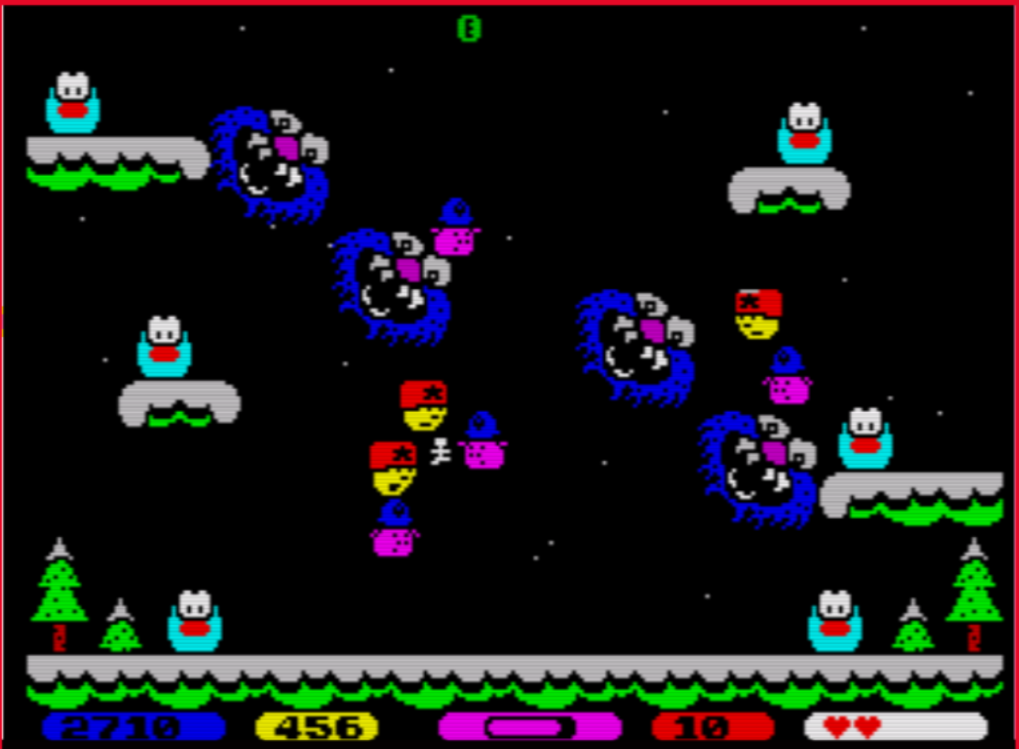
"No, it's hanging there now, waiting for a second opinion."

"Bring it here then, and I'll give you half a crown"

Dave was off like a shot, and soon enough, although the hand that loaded it was shaking, I was playing it.

You kind of know what you’re getting with Death Squad games - Bright colours, block movement, speedy arcade action with loads of sprites on screen. There’s a particular cartoon style that’s instantly recognisable, and easy on the eye, even if sometimes some of the sprites are re-used.

Mechanically, too, there tend to be similarities. You’re kiting the enemies about trying to misdirect them so you can end-run around them. This does exactly that, so it’s nothing ground-breaking, but there’s no harm in that. It’s fast, it’s fluid, it’s a bit of fun.



Calm down, Grover.

But of course, the other thing you get is the grumpy, ‘edgy’ story, which isn’t very Christmassy at all. If there are any Spirits reading out there, maybe you could gather a couple of buddies and pay Mr Squad a visit, get him to lighten up so he can go to his nephew’s dinner party, get together, have a few laughs.

JAAM Rivals

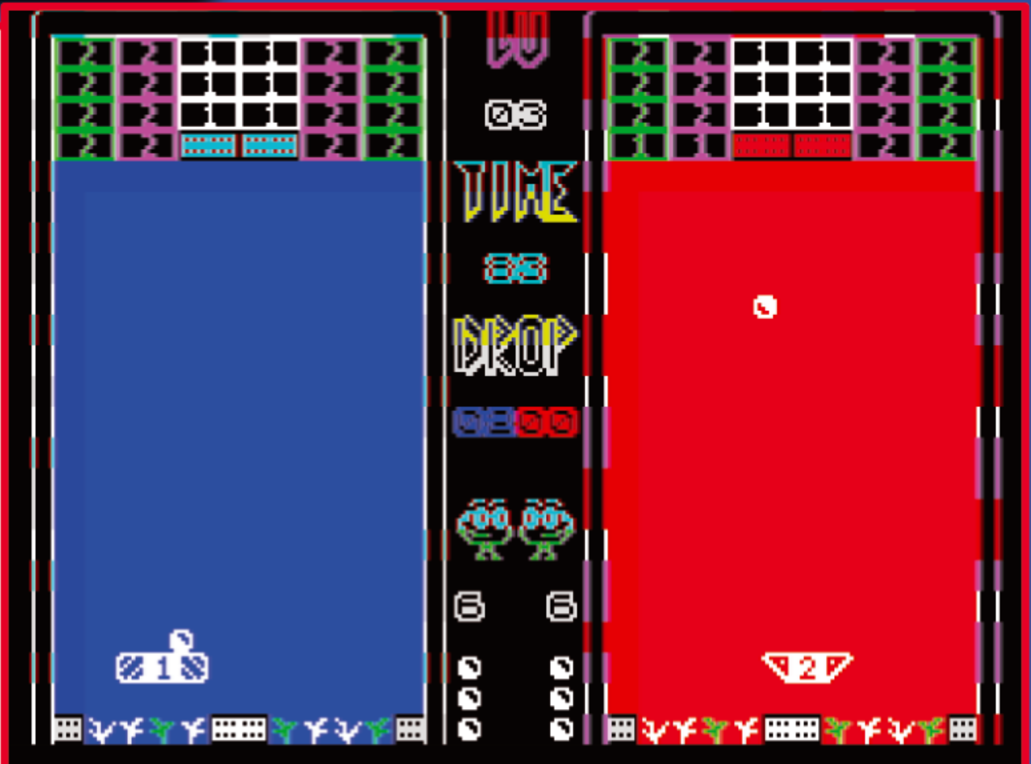
AmikoES

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45009

PWYW / €2

I've always had an affinity for Atari's Breakout. It was released the year I was born, which is odd because 2026 sees its 50th anniversary and yet I'm in my early 20s. It is also one of the games that came with our Atari 2600 and Thro' the Wall on the Horizons tape was the first thing I loaded on our brand new Spectrum 48k.

Following hot on the heels of JAAM (Just Another Arkanoid Maker) AmikoES has released a follow up "JAAM Rivals" and as the name hints, the game's main USP is its two player option.



Party Mode. Player 1 is in the lead.

It is largely standard Breakout fare, however it does differentiate itself by having blocks with numbers that need to count down to 0 before they disappear. There are also larger superblocks that need to be broken down into smaller blocks, Asteroids style. In addition if the ball bounces past your bat it doesn't necessarily mean you lose a life, depending on what it lands on underneath you, you may find yourself faced with a load of new blocks to contend with.

I played a few games against the computer and I have to say it plays a very good game but I felt that to have the full experience I needed a willing volunteer. To achieve this I roped in my teenage son, not an easy task to try to find a bit of time between him socialising with his pals and playing the latest Pokémon game, but after a few weeks of begging he finally gave in.

The game really comes alive when played against a real human, there is a timer that counts down and whoever has the lowest brick tally to clear at the end wins the round. I won the first few rounds and I felt bad for the boy. ..that was until he ran me close and then pulled a couple of last second victories out of the bag. There was much whooping and cheering and in the end he had to admit that it was "fun, I guess" which is 14-year old boy speak for "amazing 5 stars best game ever".

He's right though, it is fun, the gameplay is spot on, the additions to the formula are clever and the music is great. Of course, I've gone back to hone my skills against the Speccy. He won't get off so easily next time!

Not since Batty do I remember a simultaneous two player breakout game, and not until now have I played another one. Unlike Batty, JAAM Rivals is a two player game only, fortunately you may compete against the computer as well as a real human, and the CPU is a tough opponent. Then again, my brain vs Z80 will result in the Z80 beating me each time. Usually.

Before I continue, I must admit that I've always liked bat and ball games, be it the original Breakout, or Arkanoid, or the aforementioned Batty; I even gave Impact many chances to impress me but that was mostly because I found the advert and box art so appealing through my younger eyes "Plays like a dream… feels like a nightmare" as I recall! So, like the Snake concept that has hundreds of variants, if it's Breakout-ish, I'm in. And fortunately, this is a good one, so I'm all in.

Okay, so let me take my rose tinted spectacles off for a moment and try to be objective. The presentation is good, keys are redefinable, and there's a choice of competitors that you may choose from before you begin your battle. There are three difficulty levels to choose from, starting at the laughably named "easy" to "expert" and a "party" setting. Graphics are smooth and well defined, and each player has his or her own well to play in. The first to clear the bricks on his or her particular side is the winner of that round.

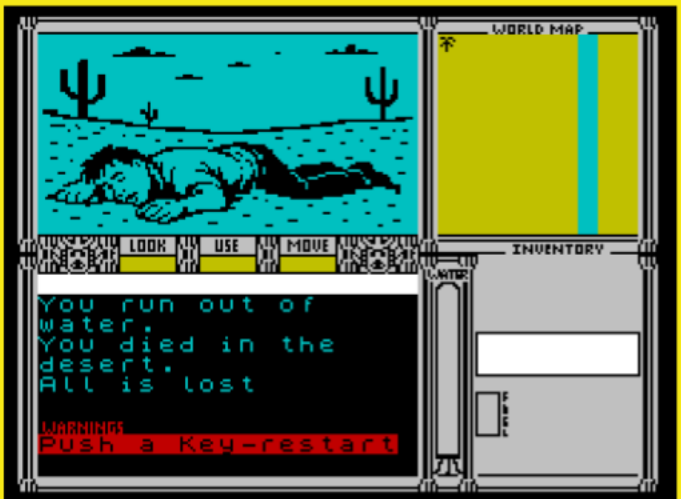
Despite the easy level being somewhat of a challenge, there is a lot of game to be had. JAAM Rivals feels like more than just another Breakout clone; there has been a lot of thought put into it, and a lot of effort with the presentation. Clearly, its developers, AmikoES, loves the [Breakout] concept as much as I do. This is great fun without a second human player, so a Billy No-Mates like me can only imagine how much better it would be with a friend or two. I can imagine a winner stays on scenario here, though to beat your opponent isn't a quick one game as each player has a number of lives to burn through. Download and enjoy.

Quivera : The Adventure

Softimar

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44737

Free



You run out of water.
You died in the desert.
All is lost

WARNINGS
Push a Key-restart

Out of my gourd in the desert

After 8 million attempts to load the game, (use Spin!) I am at last provided the opportunity to skip the intro, should I so wish. However, I select 'N' and buckle up.

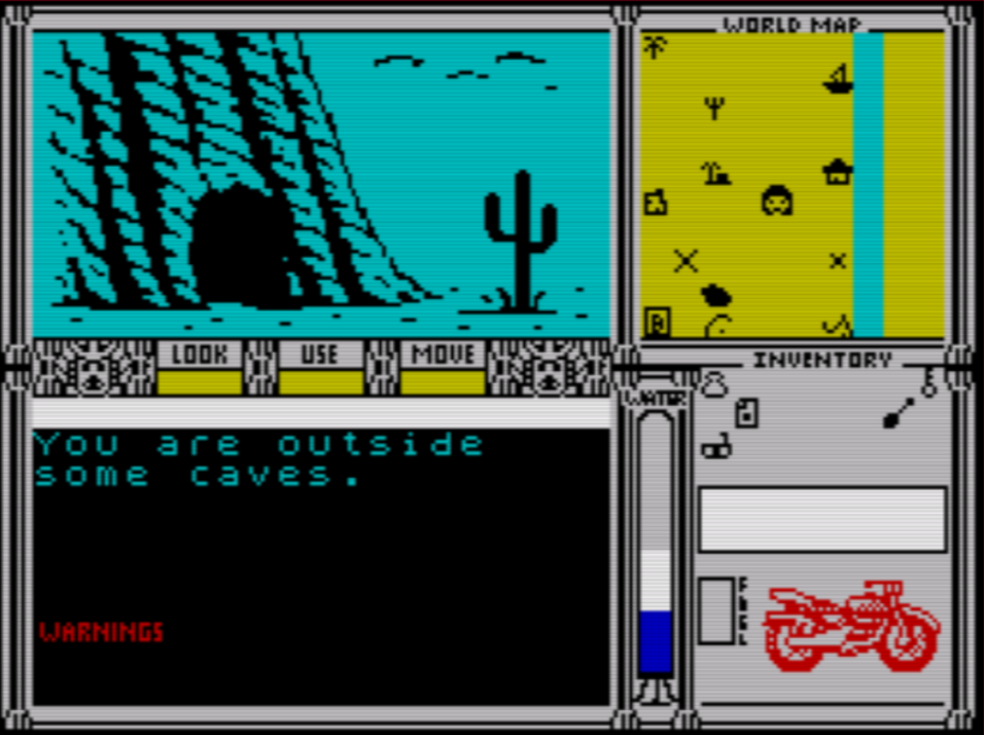
It is indeed worth the struggle. A sumptuous intro reveals a picture-rich story of a European colonialist who, having murdered a great many locals, now sighs because he can't also steal all the gold he thought they had. After all, Quivira - the lost city of gold - is only a legend.

Whoopsie, my bad.

"Steal what you can, boys. We're heading back home with only the stolen pittance of these people's entire livelihoods. Best avoid me on the boat. I shall brood all the way home."

Centuries later, a new believer is born: you. Convinced Quivira is real, you find yourself in a desert, dying of thirst as the game proper begins. Your first trial is a cruel, high-stakes mini game, a sort of "Battleships" meets desert survival where you must find a single life-saving gourd. Guess wrong, and you're a dead man walking. I perished of thirst more times than I care to admit.

What makes this so remarkable is that it's all written in BASIC, augmented with some clever graphic routines. It's an unusual graphical text adventure with a GUI, and the visuals are consistently impressive. The primary trade-off is slow speed, but I found it a bearable once I'd acclimatised. I suspect this title was truly meant for the ZX Spectrum Next, where it could fly at 28MHz. In any case, once you finally locate the blooming gourd, the game blossoms, opening up into a rich adventure. The experience is, aptly, like the gourd itself: you must first endure the bitter rind to taste the sweet flesh within.



You are outside some caves.

WARNINGS

I caved at the first sign of trouble

Here's something a bit different - a parser-free graphical adventure based on the legend of the rumoured 8th city of gold, Quivera.

I like a good immersive adventure, so I was really looking forward to this. On booting it up however, I found navigating the icons a little slow. But after doubling the speed on my emulator, the game became far more responsive and I was able to start getting stuck in.

I say "stuck in" – what I really mean is "stuck". I couldn't seem to go anywhere or do anything without promptly dying of thirst. With no tips to hand, I wandered off and watched The Seven Cities of Gold starring Anthony Quinn, hoping it might give me an advantage with the game. I can't say it really helped at all - it just wasted two hours while the Breakspace deadline crept ever closer.

Eventually, salvation arrived in the form of ZX Dave, who told me where to find the water gourd – an absolutely essential item if you want to get out of the starting blocks. From there, I was finally able to start uncovering several locations of interest. I had intended to describe the game as being a bit like Battleships – randomly moving to points on the map in the hope of finding something worthwhile – but my esteemed colleague JB got there first (the blighter). So instead, I'll compare it to Minesweeper… except instead of stepping on a mine, the danger here is finding nothing and dying of exposure.

You use the keys Q, U, A and P to move the cursor, and M to make a selection. You can LOOK if you spot something interesting in the graphics window, MOVE around the map, and USE items from your inventory.

Once you get into it, there's a fine game lurking beneath the surface, with a solid story to uncover. If you happen to be a fan of adventures, but you don't enjoy "guessing the verb", this is well worth your time. The author states he is already working on something even more ambitious - I'll look forward to that if the Speccy can contain it!

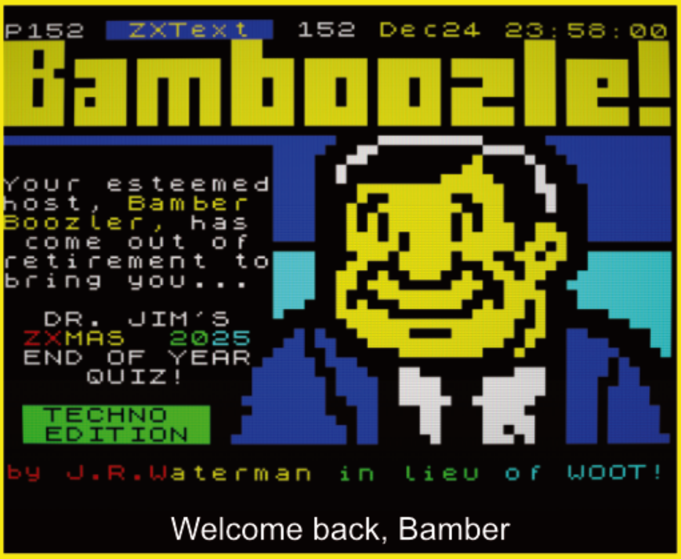
HINT: The gourd is south-west of your starting location. That should save you a few hours!

Dr Jim's ZXMas 2025 Quiz

Dr Jim Waterman et al

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45150

PWYW / $2



P152 ZXText 152 Dec24 23:58:00

Bamboozle!

Your esteemed host, Bamber Boozler, has come out of retirement to bring you...

DR. JIM'S ZXMAS 2025 END OF YEAR QUIZ!

TECHNO EDITION

by J.R.Waterman in lieu of WOOT!

Welcome back, Bamber

Cor, Bamboozle, eh?

Every afternoon after school, I'd be found shovelling grub into my face in front of the TV, checking the Teletext. Digitiser first, naturally, then over to the Bamboozle page for a bout of quizzing. Lovely. Then maybe some homework, I guess. Maybe.

That was then, though. Bamboozle wrapped up at the end of 2009, much later than I would have guessed, and has been brought back by Dr Jim as a festive treat. For several years, our very own Dave put together a compilation of efforts onto a Christmas mixtape by the name of Woot!, but in 2024 and 25 it wasn't possible due to time constraints. I can't imagine why.

So Dr. Jim decided to sub in with a yuletide treat, and called upon the citenzenry to provide questons for a quiz, which is where we are now.

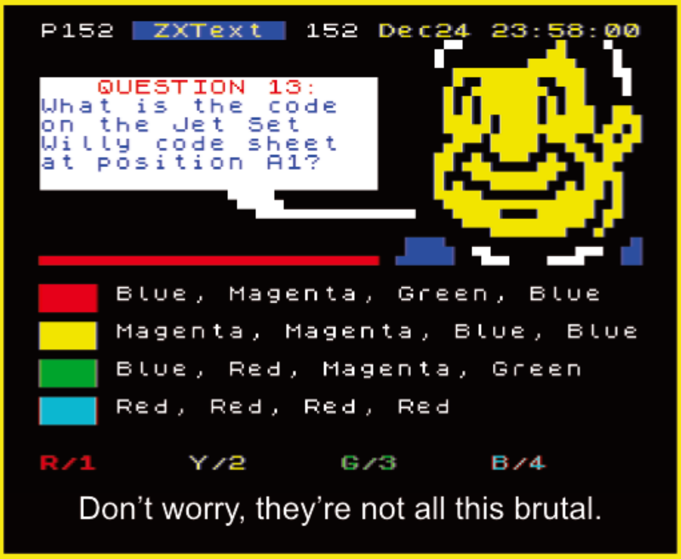
He's done a glorious job recreating the look of the Teletext screens, and the colour coded answer entry.

Each play draws randomly from a large pool, to ask 20 multiple-choice questions. You answer by choosing a colour-coded answer and proceed.

There are two sets of questions, available as different files. The first focuses on general Speccy games-knowledge. The second, where I managed at best 8 out of 20, barely above what you'd expect from guesswork, focuses on technical knowledge of the Spectrum and related hardware.

The large question set should allow for a good few replays, and the presentation delivers a solid shot of pure-strain nostalgia for anyone who had Channel 4 thirty years ago.

Just the thing for a chilly Christmas evening. But obviously it's January at least when you get to read this. Work with me, here. You know what I mean. Either way, I'll be looking forward to the 2026 edition. A fine new tradition?



P152 ZXText 152 Dec24 23:58:00

QUESTION 13:
What is the code on the Jet Set Willy code sheet at position A1?

🟥 Blue, Magenta, Green, Blue
🟨 Magenta, Magenta, Blue, Blue
🟩 Blue, Red, Magenta, Green
🟦 Red, Red, Red, Red

R/1 Y/2 G/3 B/4

Don't worry, they're not all this brutal.

Most of my life knowledge has been acquired through computer games, movies and other "pop culture", so I know that using blind luck on a multiple choice quiz where the correct answer is one of four, the likely score is 25%. Thanks, Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse for this knowledge. If I score below this, I'm either really stupid by luck, or deliberately stupid by judgement. Dr Jim's ZXmas 2025 will tell all.

This game has a pleasing teletext aesthetic. It sees the return of Bamber Boozler from the Channel Four analogue service which will bring a wry smile to many. We have multiple choice questions asking about Spectrum gaming, including games released after its commercial demise sometime in 1992 or 1993 (depending on your viewpoint), or a more serious set of questions about the technical side of Sinclair. I'm up for both.

For such a simple game, there's a lot of effort here: not only its author considered all technical aspects of the 128K Spectrum technologies when making it, he's gone for the most compatible too, ensuring it'll work on the +3 downwards. An impressive total of 16 people contributed to this game, and each play through consists of 20 questions. (Oh, and if you were wondering if I'm stupid by luck, or by judgement, my first score was 12/20, so neither in this instance).

This is perfect for Speccy gatherings or solo winter nights. This quiz nails Speccy trivia with style, exposing my software knowledge and hardware blind spots in equal measure. With 273 questions in the bank, it's got good replay value; play enough, and you might even absorb some facts too. See if you can beat my score of 12/20. That should be easy for someone like you, won't it?

Pulplife

Jhonnystorm

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/45169

PWYW / €2

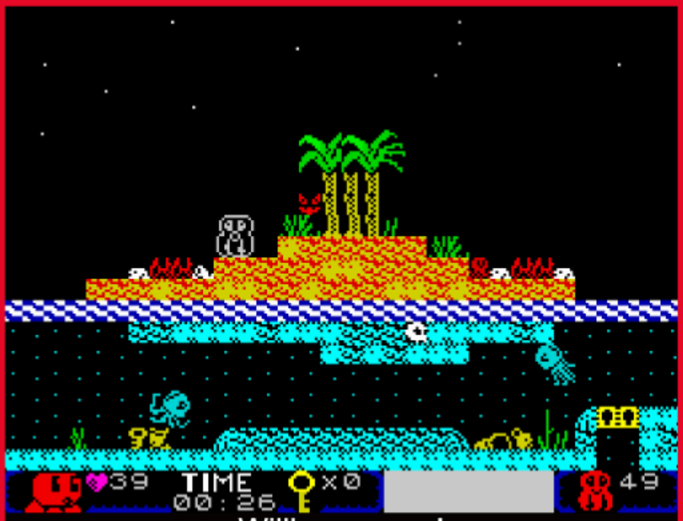
No, this is nothing to do with a supergroup comprised of 1990's Britpop sensations Pulp & Blur. Put any thoughts of a Sheffieldian dandy fighting with Knees-up Damon Albarn to decide their musical identity—Pulplife is a 128K ZXGM game about octopuses.

The game begins with the birth of an octopus family on a remote reef. You are the older brother, and your fifty siblings have been scattered by currents and are in great danger. Now I did some fact checking here, and it turns out that 50 is about right. Because a Common Octopus lays tens or hundreds of thousands of eggs, and only about 1% of those survive. So hats off to the author for scientific rigour.

It's worth noting that you need to hold the Enter key for at least 2 seconds to make the game start. The absence of instructions and slowness of the keypress check has unfortunately been an obstacle for some.

Once you do start, you get to explore an attractive marine world of reefs & caves as well as the ocean from top to bottom. And your siblings have managed to secrete themselves all over the shop, including some annoying brats that fancied settling in lava lakes.

As a developed adult octopus, you have the ability to attack enemies by either shooting them or jumping on their head. This again shows accurate research as octopuses are known to throw projectiles and physically attack prey. Maybe they asked Sir David Attenborough - I bet he's a Spec-Chum.



Willlssoooooon!

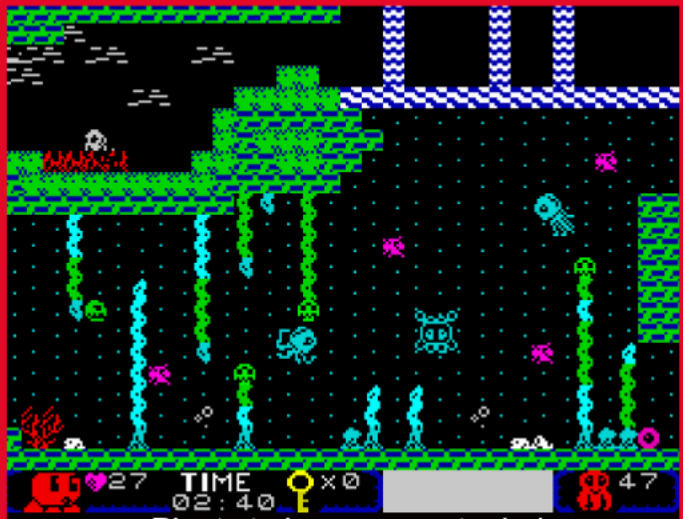
Pulplife has a large map, but it's varied and memorable, with a generous life allowance and plenty of top ups available. It reminds me of playing the underwater sections of The New Zealand Story, only without the stress of suffocation. The way you jump out of water on the coast or in air pockets is very similar.

Curiously, this game was originally intended for release on the Gamepark 32, a 16bit console from the early 2000s. The author didn't manage to finish during its commercial lifespan, so shelved the project despite being 90% complete. Well, that defunct handheld's loss is the ZX-Spectrum's gain, and Pulplife is another tape on the shelf showing that everyone's favourite 8-bit computer is alive and kicking.

This is it, dear reader. This is, unless there's a last minute emergency game that's been missed, my last review for issue four. It all began in what seems like an age ago, before even Hallowe'en of 2025, and now we're into the first few days of 2026, the highest year ever under the current Gregorian calendar, don't you know. Anyway, these games are delicious, and much like that Christmas Day Dinner, or New Year Buffet, I feel like I've been pigging out on very palatable game software.

Pulplife then is a great game to sign this issue off with too, let me assure you. It begins with a bright and pleasing title screen accompanied by a short, cheerful tune; sadly, 48K purists miss out here.

A large family of Octopi has been scattered due to unusually strong currents. As the big brother of the family, it's up to you to reunite your siblings and save the day. Here we may control our hero to move effortlessly through the water, and who is even able to traverse dry land too. He may spit out venom balls that will take out various baddies. There are quite a lot of lives on beginning this rum quest, which act more like an energy bar. That rather healthy looking 39 counter will go quicker than you think as crossing the path of one of the manic patrollers will decrease it by up to three at a time. This may be rejuvenated with purple hearts, be on the look out for them.



Plenty to keep you octopied

There are no bad parts of this, but I must say that the stand out in Pulplife is some rather cutely drawn graphics. My daughter therefore doesn't like me "killing" these cute foes, especially the crabs, which makes this game a little more of a challenge in places. At least until she's not looking over my shoulder (something I don't understand with this generation; many of them would rather watch someone playing a game instead of playing it).

It seems then that the best has been saved until last, at least if I exclude for a moment Zak McDruken Saves the Chickens, and Dr Jim's ZXMas 2025 Quiz, and Roshi Milk Course, and… bugger it, it's been a vintage year of Speccy software, and this is the icing on the cake.

Star Carrier Ruffian

Softimar

https://spectrumcomputing.co.uk/entry/44269

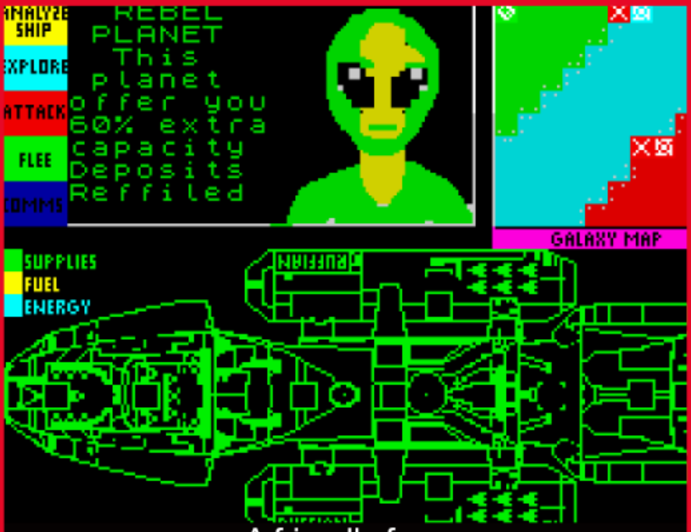
Free

Star Carrier Ruffian is war strategy mixed with resource management, set in space, and inspired by Battlestar Galactica. And unsurprisingly, it's the 1978 series' version of the ship, because everything was better back then, even the future.

This review has been a long time coming since its release in May 2025, and it's only taken us 4 issues to work out how to play it. There were problems due to emulator loading errors and the slowness of code. Nevertheless, it does work, and what's 10 months between friends when humanity is under attack from The Robot Race (who bear no resemblance to the Cylons™).

This is a 128K game, programmed in BASIC with a bit of machine code. So the extra memory allows us a cinematic intro with plenty of splash screens. It tells the story of how the Star Carrier Ruffian was out on manoeuvres and returned to discover the home planet of Caelion vanquished by the Robots. It valiantly engaged them in combat, but the fight was as one-sided as Miss Marple versus Mike Tyson, so the only option left for the Ruffian was to power down and 'play dead'*, a tactical master stroke which fooled the Robots. So the Ruffian was safe for now, but left crippled and with a score to settle.

Now you must read the instructions, and keep them by your side while you feel your way around. The GUI may look as complex as the control panel on the real Battlestar Galactica, but it's not so bad. As soon as you learn the keys are QAOPM you'll feel on solid ground. There are only five options to think about: Analyze (sic) Ship, Explore, Attack, Flee and Comms. The 'analyze' option is the least intuitive, involving looking at the state of each sector of the ship and transferring energy from the batteries. Explore takes you to the little galaxy map at the top right, with a green and red area of space separated by an unnavigable cyan asteroid field. You can only cross this field by leaping through a black hole, which as luck wouldn't have it, is guarded by a big boss. Before you even think about taking that on, you'll need to explore more and garner resources from friendly planets to get the Ruffian ship-shape.



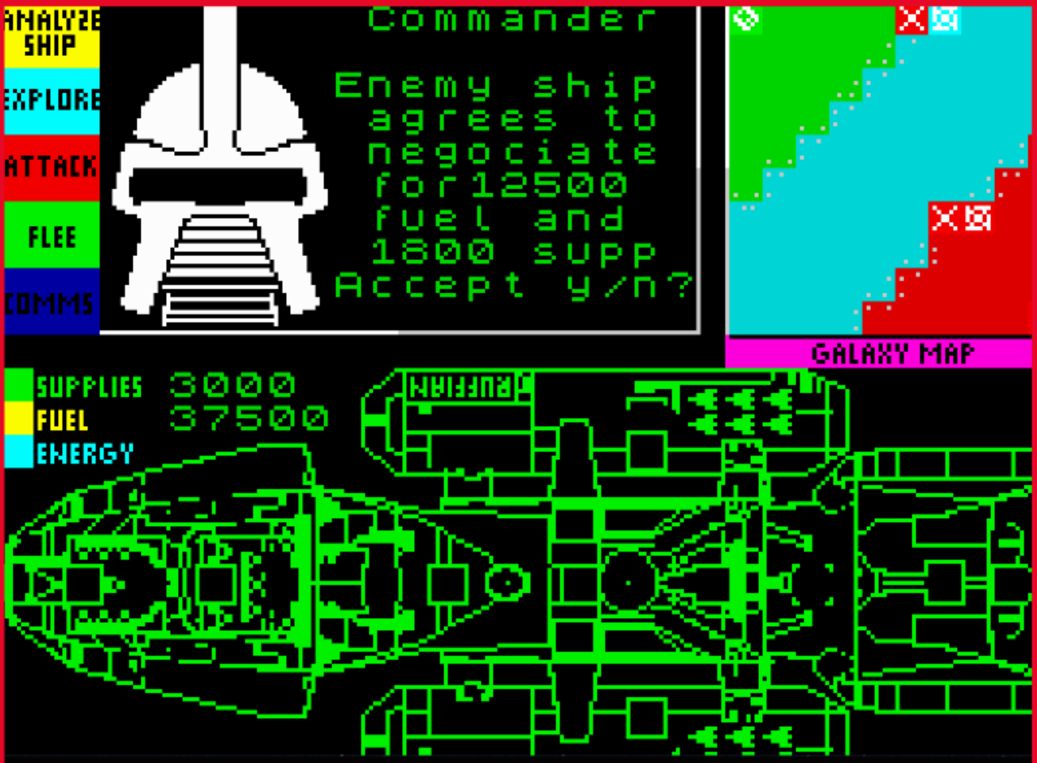
REBEL PLANET
This planet offer you 60% extra capacity Deposits Reffiled

A friendly face

On the way you'll meet smaller enemies that you can attack or use resources to try to barter your way out of hostilities. The fights themselves are turn based and rely on probabilities based on the condition of each ship. You do have a small part to play though, as you get a 4 second window during your turn to move the cursor to the '30'—which gives you a 30% boost in maximum damage. It's not always possible to reach it due to obstacles and sheer distance, but you'll need to try.

Star Carrier Ruffian is an interesting take on a space strategy game, channelling the spirit of 80s bedroom coders who had the freedom to try out novel ideas. The slowness of the BASIC may put you off and even confuse you initially, but it's worth persevering because this game is a welcome addition to a rare genre. And talking of rarities, isn't it nice to hear the word 'ruffian' getting an outing?

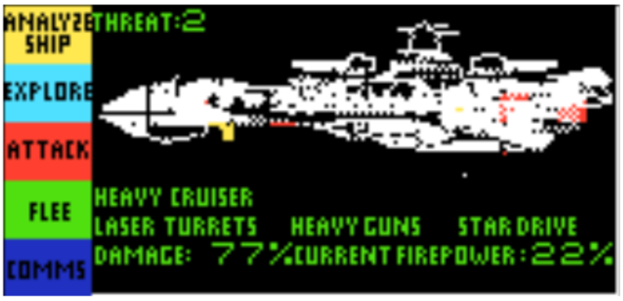
*which incidentally would be Marple's best option in her mercurial and frankly ill-advised bout of pugilism.



Commander
Enemy ship agrees to negociate for 12500 fuel and 1800 supp Accept y/n?

Will you accept the charges?

Boy, howdy. That Battlestar Galactica, eh? What a great show. Some of the best of the early 2000s quality TV wave, right up until it wasn't. The 70's one was okay too, I guess.



ANALYZE SHIP
EXPLORE
ATTACK
FLEE
COMMS

THREAT:2

HEAVY CRUISER
LASER TURRETS HEAVY GUNS STAR DRIVE
DAMAGE: 77% CURRENT FIREPOWER:22%

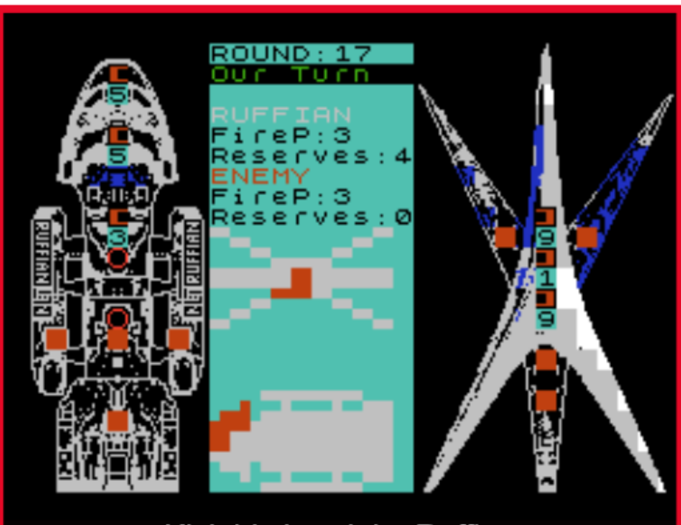
Happily, this has NOTHING TO DO with either one. Although, both show and game share a streak of wild ambition. Both set up to telling an epic story of intergalactic war and survival, with the spectacular multi-screen intro here worthy of special attention. Overall, it's a superbly well-presented game. We are about out of ways to say that games don't look like we expect BASIC games to, but here's one more for the road - This looks as good as anything in this issue, with the wireframe ~~Galact~~ Ruffian a classy touch.

The game itself is a boardgame-like, turn-based resource management affair. After a play or two, I had the gist of it and there weren't many surprises. There's a little randomness to the exploration, and you'll need to pick your fights carefully, as you steadily upgrade your ~~BattleSt~~ Star Carrier's capabilities. The combats themselves though, are where the wheels fall off the wagon somewhat. Simply put, they take too long. Each round redraws the screens somewhat slowly and unneccesarily, and you end up spending most of your time waiting. The realtime manouvering to get a 30% bonus is a good idea, but let down by the insensitivity of the controls.

Of course, these speed issues can be mitigated by speeding up your emulation, but that's cheating.

A few more choices in how to upgrade the ship might make a difference too, and make for a more RPG-like affair. The big-map exploration breaking into close combat is a fine tradition, and just a little extra complexity would make it more appealing. This does feel like a JRPG in disguise, and is a whisker from greatness. A little more variety would help, but mainly it's the speed issues which get in the way, and you'll need to apply a hefty dose of patience. But then, that's how I feel about Final Fantasy 7, and people love that.

Anyway. ~~Cylons~~ Robots are cooler than Cloud McBigSword, or whatever he's called. If you're looking for a slow-paced tactical experience, this might be just the ticket. So say we all.



ROUND:17
Our Turn
RUFFIAN
FireP:3
Reserves:4
ENEMY
FireP:3
Reserves:0

Kick his head in, Ruffian

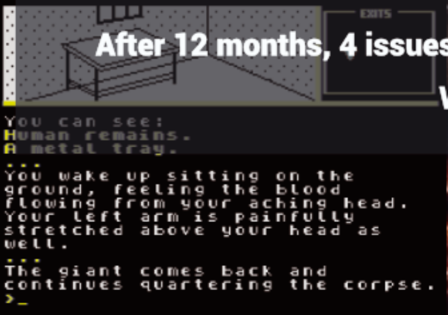
death is an inevitability.

Happy New Year!

Game of the Year

After 12 months, 4 issues and 157 games, it's time to decide on the eternal question : What's best?

We asked the Review Crew to pick out their Top 5.

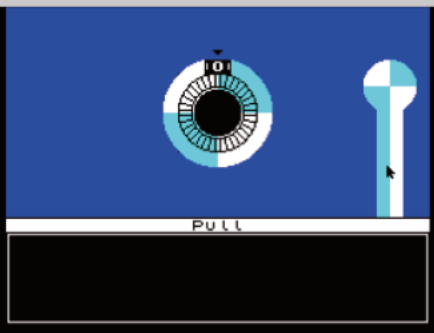


```
You can see:
Human remains.
A metal tray.
...
You wake up sitting on the
ground, feeling the blood
flowing from your aching head.
Your left arm is painfully
stretched above your head as
well.
...
The giant comes back and
continues quartering the corpse.
>_
```

WorldofSpells
Castle of spells
8
12
Door is opening
FPS: 45.4

SMELL OF BREAD 15

```
HANNY: I CAN WRITE A POEM ABOUT
YOU, BUT I NEED A GOOD RHYME.
```



Dave's Selections :

Frogger RX : Nobody, professional or hobbyist, now or then, for any incentive, could do a better Spectrum Frogger port.

The Locked Room : Once you know the answers it's a minigame, but getting to that point is a journey of epic proportions.

Bubbleback : Sometimes a creator makes something they love, and the assembled dev team knock it out the park.

Master Piece : This didn't invent Solitaire Chess, but they did a fantastic job with it. This kept a lot of us indoors at the start of Spring.

Runaway Nose : This quirky and innovative take on Gogol's short story is the Spiwit Of The Spectrum incarnate.

Sloany's Selections :

Zak McDrucken : The technical skills here are unmatched. Except matched by the gameplay, which it has in spades.

SkillTeam : This won me over with its simple mechanics and perfect level design. I lost whole evenings to this and didn't mind at all.

Gorf : A veritable smorgasbord of golden era single screen shoot-'em-ups. I love Gorf, and this conversion nails the gameplay and looks.

S1ncla1r C1ty : A clever mix of genres which I completely fell for. I love the style, and the references to classic Speccy characters.

Football Manager Revisited : I'm late to the annual update party, but found myself utterly addicted.

HAMMER TIME!
3
SHOOT
SHIELD
RUNES

SC0042337
56786
HI000200
EMPTY
FULL
A TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND

Jon's Selections :

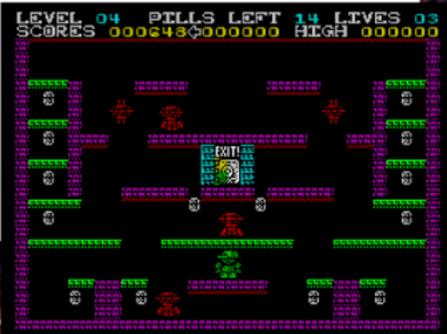
Cubix : Simply stunning. I want to steal this game, take it back to the early 90's and release it myself to universal acclaim.

Asymmetry : A feast for the senses! With so much happening on the screen, it's like you're back in the arcades. Great blasting fun.

Zak McDrucken : Stupid chickenz! Fantastic puzzler which I really got stuck into. One I'll keep 'pecking away at' way into 2026.

Hammer Knight : Great little platformer that I didn't put down until I'd completed it.

Bubbleback : Ok, That's my part of the deal done, Sloany - now give me the photos back (and the negatives).


LEVEL 04 PILLS LEFT 14 LIVES 03
SCORES 000648 000000 HIGH 000000
EXIT!

Shaun's Selections :

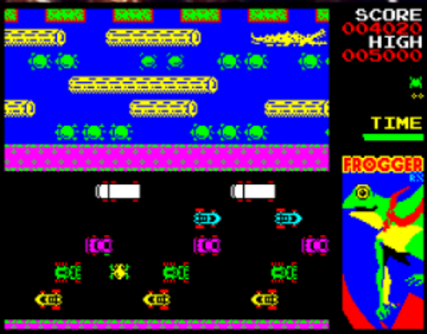
Bubbleback : I really love this game. It's bright, cheerful, well designed, and the music is simply awesome.

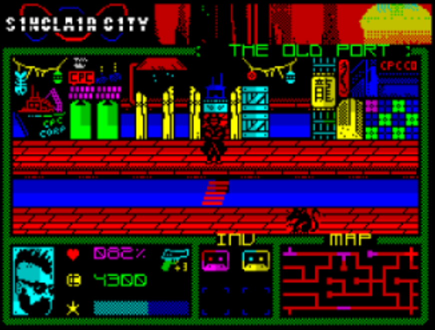
Cubix : I thought I'd seen it all on the ZX Spectrum, and then this came along.The power of Sinclair!

Frogger RX : This really brings the arcade look and feel home to Sinclair's rubber-keyed monolith. I love it.

Hammer Knight : A thoroughly enjoyable romp which I just had replay, and replay, and replay. An engrossing epic.

The Experiment : I don't like text adventure games, and I hate horror movies. But apparently a mix of the two can be this entertaining.


SCORE
004020
HIGH
005000
TIME
FROGGER RX


SINCLAIR CITY
THE OLD PORT
IND
MAP
4300

Mpk's Selections :

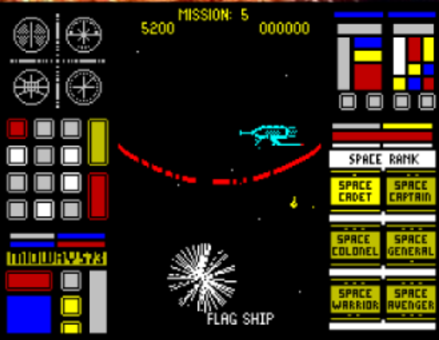
MoonRN : The game that was so good that it made me feel bad about not running GOTY on the SC forums again. So I started a magazine. Worth.

Throbbing Headache DX : Fantastic, one-of-a-kind jumping mechanics drew me into this tough platformer and its seasonal brethren.

World of Spells : Genuinely astonishing technically, and with classic FPS gameplay to match. Should not exist on the Speccy.

The Locked Room : It's short, but I loved the best-in-class interface and the devious puzzles while it lasted. Hoping for more of this.

Frogger RX: Jamie's sick right now so I'm popping this in here on his behalf. He really, really likes Frogger (and it saves me the stress of picking).

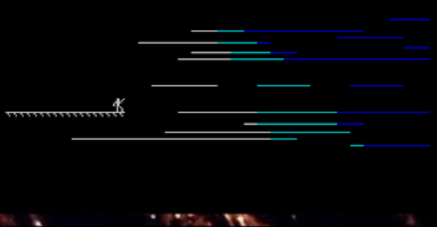

MISSION: 5
5200
000000
SPACE RANK
SPACE CADET
SPACE CAPTAIN
SPACE COLONEL
SPACE GENERAL
SPACE WARRIOR
SPACE AVENGER
FLAG SHIP

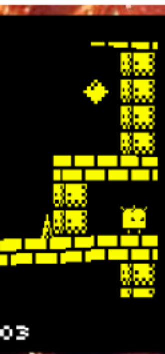
So in the end, we couldn't decide.

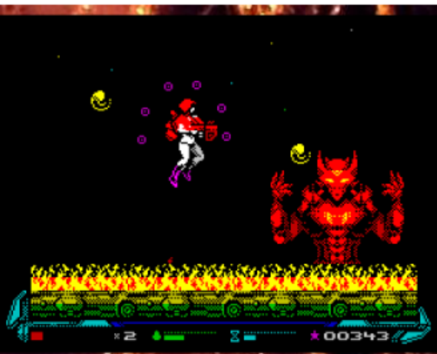
Which is right and proper - everyone has their favourites, and trying to argue out a winner would cause more strife in the Towers than we can afford.

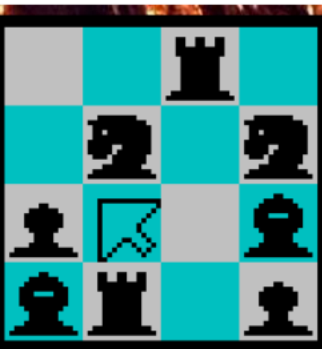
But that's not very satisfying, is it?

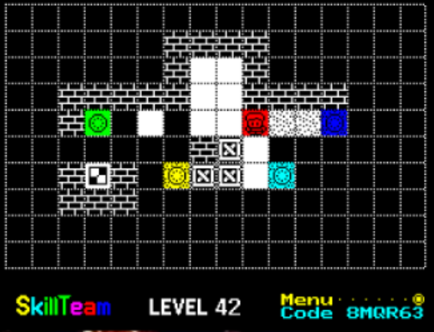
So, over the page, it's over to you...









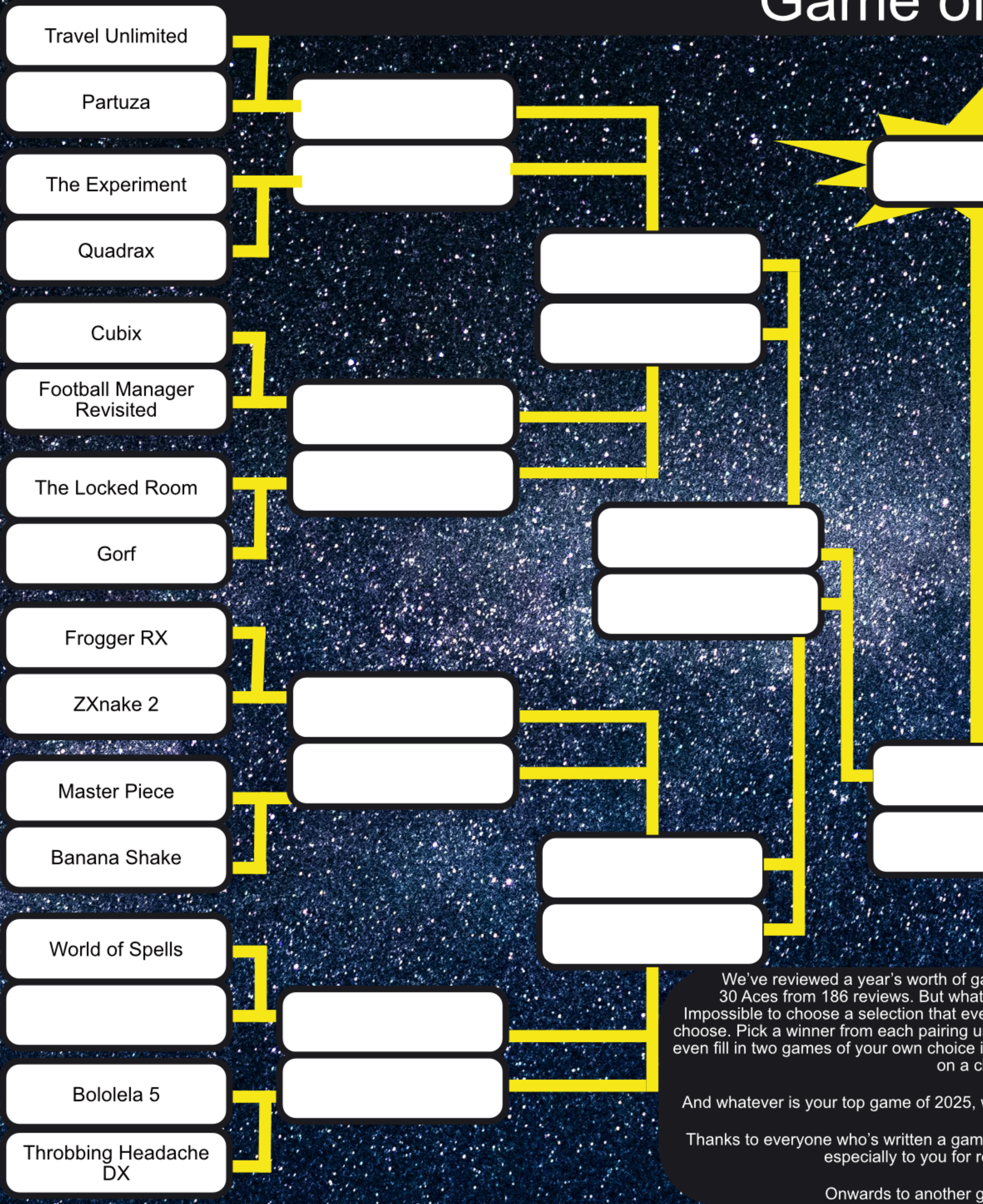

SkillTeam
LEVEL 42
Menu Code 8MQR63

The 2025 BreakSpace Magazine Ga

YOURS to CUT OU

We have placed all Aces from 2025 into a seeded bracket. YOU decide who v

Game of



Travel Unlimited

Partuza

The Experiment

Quadrax

Cubix

Football Manager Revisited

The Locked Room

Gorf

Frogger RX

ZXnake 2

Master Piece

Banana Shake

World of Spells

Bololela 5

Throbbing Headache DX

We've reviewed a year's worth of ga
30 Aces from 186 reviews. But what
Impossible to choose a selection that eve
choose. Pick a winner from each pairing u
even fill in two games of your own choice i
on a c

And whatever is your top game of 2025, v

Thanks to everyone who's written a gam
especially to you for r

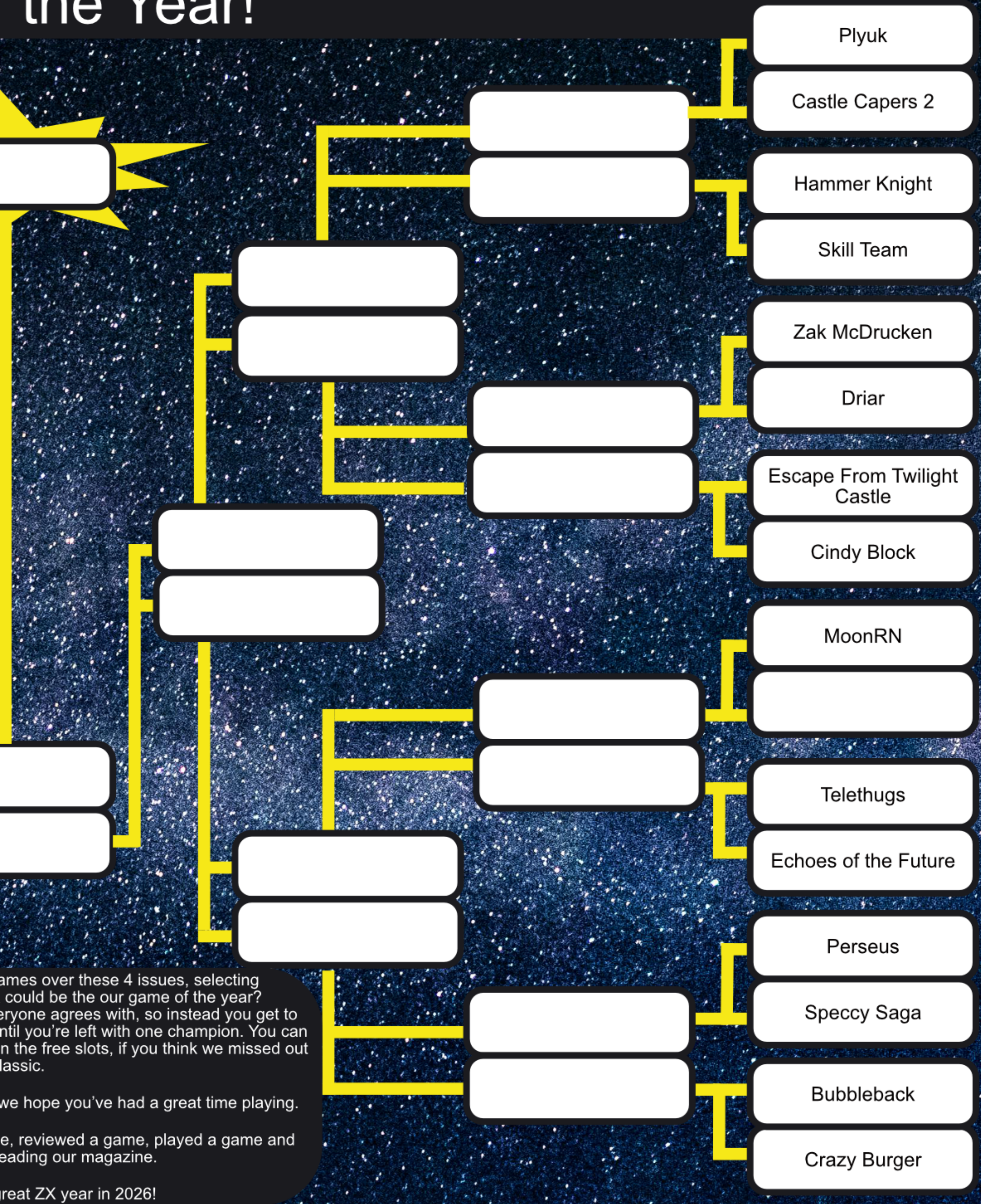
Onwards to another c

ame of the Year Interactive Wallchart!

UT (print) and KEEP (throw away)

wins each round, and moves on to the next, culminating with one champion, one

f the Year!



Plyuk

Castle Capers 2

Hammer Knight

Skill Team

Zak McDrucken

Driar

Escape From Twilight Castle

Cindy Block

MoonRN

Telethugs

Echoes of the Future

Perseus

Speccy Saga

Bubbleback

Crazy Burger

ames over these 4 issues, selecting could be the our game of the year? eryone agrees with, so instead you get to ntil you're left with one champion. You can n the free slots, if you think we missed out lassic.

we hope you've had a great time playing.

e, reviewed a game, played a game and eading our magazine.

reat ZX year in 2026!

ANDREW RYALS'

HACK PACK

Last issue I think I managed hacks for 27 games, this issue we have pokes for 45 games, a real Brucie Bonus! I honestly think we are getting more and more games released and we seem to be in a bit of a golden era of new Speccy releases. I was asked to produce some more pokes for the Yandex 2025 games party, I did some in the last issue and I have produced a few more here, mainly Cubix, Bodyguard, Galacic Nexus and a few others - but then I've had to miss some out due to them being in Russian!

It's also quite neat producing new POKEs for games at the end of the year. I had great fun playing some of the Halloween releases. Blood of Dracula was one which stood out as it really entered into the spirit (sorry couldn't resist) of Hallowe'en. We also have the excellent Xenomaze with nothing to hack but really scary and an excellent remake of Monster Maze 3D.

Yet another MIA was found (and hacked) in the form of Battle Sity. It still amazes me that new (old) stuff is being found and recovered and then you have remakes of games from wonderful old systems likes Martian Wars from the Wang range of computers from 1979!
Finally, we come to the Xmas period where various Speccy dedicated website release new games and old things that have been found. This year was no different - I had some fun over Xmas messing around with some new (very old) stuff.

Alibaba

60230,x	x=lives

Alien (Mansoft)

32833,0	Infinite lives
57570,x	Switch Room
57571,x	x=lives
57578,x	x=ammo
26098,0	Infinite ammo

Alien Attack : Invaded Colony

25867,0	Infinite ammo
55932,x	x=ammo
36282,0	Infinite lives
55025,x	x=lives

Astrodrone (v1.48)

56507,x	x=fuel
30593,0	Infinite fuel
33618,0	Infinite lives
56501,x	x=lives
56504,x	x=crystals

Battle Sity

26930,x	x=Tanks to destroy

Bit 101 Save Christmas

32033,x	x=loves

Blood of Dracula

48523,183	Infinite lives
48429,x	x=lives

Bodyguard

48561,0	Infinite lives
24746,x	x=lives

Boriel Wall v1.1

41893,0	Infinite lives
34848,x	x=lives

Catshell

34313,0	Infinite lives
54042,x	x=lives

Crabby is Back

32038,x	x=lives

Cubix

49109,x	x=lives

Down The Pipe

48429,x	x=lives
48523,183	Infinite lives

Floppyverse

33532,0	Infinite lives
24608,x	x=lives
41813,0	Infinite moves
24625,x	x=moves
24600,x	x=discs

Galacic Nexus

60715,x	x=lives
60921,x	x=Type 1 aliens

Hit the Fan

48523,183	Infinite lives
48429,x	x=lives

Lopenzo

57188,x	x=lives

JAMM Rivals

45649,0	Infinite time
24639,x	x=time
35782,0	Infinite lives (P1)
24617,x	x=lives (P1)

Magic Adventures

35642,0	Infinite lives
57782,x	x=lives
57784,x	x=shots
57787,x	x=lightning
62592,201	Immunity

Mazinger Z etc.

44105,0	Infinite lazer
25602,x	x=lazer
37942,0	Infinite lives
24613,x	x=lives
37931,0	Infinite energy
24614,x	x=energy
43085,0	Infinite keys
24615,x	x=keys

Maria's Xmas Cards (Next)

43383,x	x=Money, pt 1
43370,x	x=Money, pt 2
43435,x	x=Money, pt 3
43422,x	x=Money, pt 4

Martian War

39004,x	x=humans
39005,x	x=aliens

Max Stone Dos

38453,0	x=Infinite lives
24612,x	x=lives

Max Stone : Micro Hobby edition

38957,0	Infinite time
24603,x	x=lives
24604,x	x=keys
24605,x	x=seals

Ninja Secret Agent

34574,0	Infinite lives
24607,x	x=lives
42154,0	Infinite shuriken
24603,x	x=shuriken

Ninja Secret Agent 2

34839,0	Infinite lives
24613,x	x=lives
42506,0	Infinite weapons
24603,0	x=weapons
24614,x	x=keys

OC-Man+

49034,0	Infinite lives
26051,x	x=lives
26053,x	x=level
48940,201	Immunity

Rebel Wars

36131,0	Infinite lives
54219,x	x=lives

Roojliek

64218,x	x=health
64220,x	x=max health
64220,x	x=experience points
64224,x	x=XP Level

Roshi's Milk Course

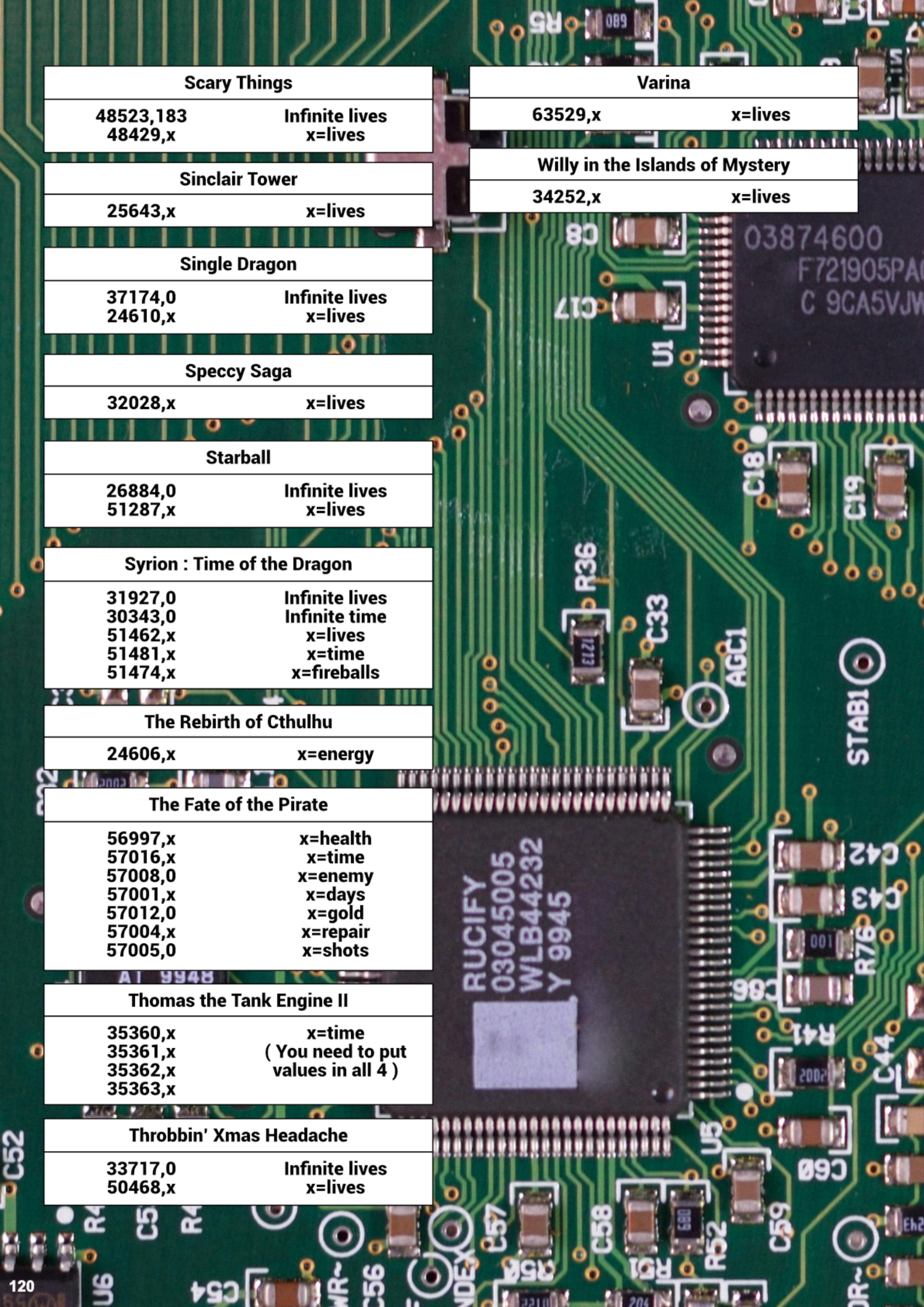
35144,0	Infinite lives

Sam's Ashes Nightmare

27109,0	Infinite lives
34257,x	x=lives

Santa's Lost & Found

44352,x	x=lives



Scary Things

48523,183	Infinite lives
48429,x	x=lives

Sinclair Tower

25643,x	x=lives

Single Dragon

37174,0	Infinite lives
24610,x	x=lives

Speccy Saga

32028,x	x=lives

Starball

26884,0	Infinite lives
51287,x	x=lives

Syrion : Time of the Dragon

31927,0	Infinite lives
30343,0	Infinite time
51462,x	x=lives
51481,x	x=time
51474,x	x=fireballs

The Rebirth of Cthulhu

24606,x	x=energy

The Fate of the Pirate

56997,x	x=health
57016,x	x=time
57008,0	x=enemy
57001,x	x=days
57012,0	x=gold
57004,x	x=repair
57005,0	x=shots

Thomas the Tank Engine II

35360,x	x=time
35361,x	(You need to put values in all 4)
35362,x	
35363,x	

Throbbin' Xmas Headache

33717,0	Infinite lives
50468,x	x=lives

Varina

63529,x	x=lives

Willy in the Islands of Mystery

34252,x	x=lives

Glossary

'What are these awful nerds talking about?', you may ask yourself. Fair question.

If you're not yet quite fully immersed in the Spectruverse, there may well some terminology that needs explaining.

Let's try.

Funky, Skillo

"It's crap," Your Sinclair would exclaim, largely about itself, "but in a funky, skillo sort of way." Both funky and skillo were considered desirable traits at the time.

mystery link

Toast-rack

The 128k Spectrum had a set of heatsink cooling ridges along the right-hand side of its chassis, which earned it this affectionate nickname, as the ridges could conceivably be used to support tiny slices of toast.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ZX_Spectrum

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

This is a condition caused by pressure on the median nerves in the wrist. Traditionally triggered by trying to type on a ZX80 or ZX81 for any length of time, but can also be a result of overuse of rubber on the fingers. Or Daley Thompson.

https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/carpal-tunnel-syndrome/symptoms-causes/syc-20355603

DEF FN

Not to be confused with hip-hop label Def Jam, DEF FN means DEFine FunctioN and allows BASIC gurus to, uh, define a function, like in proper languages*. It allows clever stuff without resorting to GO TO or GO SUB, which take ages.

https://documentation.help/BASin/kwd_deffn.html

JRPG

The Japanese Role-Playing Game genre, popularised by games like Final Fantasy, involves turn-based tactical battles where your characters and their foes take turns striking each other with various attacks and effects, normally while patiently waiting in line. This means that a Japanese role-playing game like Zelda isn't a JRPG. But Hafoc Tor is? I think? I'm confused.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Eastern_role-playing_video_games

Gleaming the Cube

Not an innuendo, but an archaic skateboarding phrase used in the 1980s, popularised by the 1989 Christian Slater film of the same name. Meaning: push your limits to the absolute edge, skating with fearless intensity, reaching peak performance or taking risks.

https://youtu.be/PnA7p1LXtUc

S.E.U.D.

A handy tool from Jonathan Cauldwell, releasd by Cronosoft in 2008. It allows users to build scrolling shoot-em-ups with a simple menu system and scripting language. Phil Collins wrote a song about it's input/output routines.

https://cronosoft.fwscart.com/

*Please address any hate-mail to sirAlan@amstrad.com

The End
again

0 OK, 10:4

Yep, it took us 4 issues before we linked to the wikipedia entry for the Zx Spectrum. Maybe we should have led with that.

But we did it - a full year of Speccy games reviewed.

It's been 12 months of highs and, well, mostly just highs.

Are we getting better? Worse? Can we keep it up? Should we? Speak your branes at us via the email address BreakSpaceInbox@gmail.com . Anything goes, just send it.

The Review Crew could use another member or two, so if you're in any way literate and know what a joke looks like, get in touch! It's easy and fun!

We're also on Bluesky as @breakspace.bsky.app

Issue 5 is on the way, in April.

Next Time :

More reviews, including :

Max Stone!
Awass!
Tiny Tim!

Plus whatever random nonsense we can manifest.

All design elements are copyright Mpk, including the BreakSpace logo and the Breakspace Ace design.

Cover art copyright of Nick at Keezees.com

Cartoons copyright of Dave Hughes. Is there anything he can't do?

All text remains copyright the individual authors. Original content, do not steal.

All design and layout done with Affinity Publisher & Designer packages. Affinity is free now, but we haven't moved to the new version yet. Still using the one we paid for.

Any other background graphical element that looks like it was done by someone who knew what they were doing is courtesy of stock images from pexels.com.

Ingestion of any part of this into any AI, LLM or other system is forbidden. The charge for any breach of this is twenty two million Euro, to be paid directly to Mpk.

Break Space is provided free of charge. If you've somehow managed to pay for it, let us know.